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DANTE

DANTE

BY

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WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS
EDINBURGH AND LONDON
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DANTE.

INTRODUCTION.

THE name of Dante Alighieri, the first and greatest of Italian poets, has been universally allowed a place in the very highest rank of literature—that airy summit reaching to the skies, where as yet only two others have been acknowledged as his equals, sovereign poets, beyond all competition or decay. Like Homer, he may be said to have created, in using it, the noble language in which his great poem is the chief monument; like Shakespeare, he has searched to the deepest roots of life, and combined philosophy with imagination: but his position is independent and individual, as distinct from those of his great companions as they are from each other. He is the Poet of the Middle Ages, as Homer was of the primeval heroic world; and he has the best right to head and lead the representatives of European letters as being himself the first fount and well-spring of modern literature and poetry. Before the time of Shakespeare the "well of English undefiled" had already been opened; but Dante formed

into written speech the tongue in which, against all precedent, he chose to tell his great and solemn tale—a masterpiece of poetic imagination which, in all the after-refinements of the language, has never been equalled. The great dramatists of Greece press close upon the steps of their venerable leader, but neither in Italy nor in Latin Europe has any one arisen worthy to take his place by the side of the great dreamer, who was the first to rescue the vulgar tongue, the language of the people, from the babble of common affairs, and make of it that noble, sonorous, majestic Italian language which has ever since been the admiration of the world. He is thus the head not of Italy alone, but of all the literature of the West, so varied, so splendid, so individual. Before Dante, the learned class, which included not only the writers but the readers of those early ages, regarded the spoken languages of their day with the indifference of contempt, incredulous of any power in them to express the thoughts of the wise. "It seemed to me," said the prior of a seaside monastery, where the poet strayed in one of his many wanderings, "not only difficult but inconceivable that he could embody in the vulgar tongue so arduous a work; and it scarcely appeared seemly to array so much knowledge in a popular garment." This was the conviction of the early Christian centuries. The vague floating ballads and heroic tales with which the people—unconsidered by the superior class who wrote and were written for in Latin—consoled themselves, remained long without the safeguard of any writing at all, floating in the air, engraved in thousands of rude memories, the inheritance of wandering minstrels—here a wild Niblung song as in Germany, there a never-ending romance of

Arthur as in the Celtic lands. To be recorded on vellum, and laid up in libraries, was a fortune too high for the half-developed tongues in which mothers murmured over their children and masters ordered their servants—good enough for such everyday uses, but for nothing more. The stately Latin, the Catholic language, was the inheritance of all who knew; it had the advantage of reaching that oligarchy in all the corners of Europe, irrespective of the differences in their common dialects—and this unquestionable advantage gave a certain reasonableness to the preference of the learned for the language of learning, the only grammatical and regulated medium for their thoughts.

In the twelfth century, however, twitterings of native song began to rise over the common country, irrepressible—rising among the Provençal vineyards, echoing back from Teutonic wastes, and by the dim and stormy shores of ancient Bretagne, and caught up again among the Umbrian villages. "The use of the vulgar tongue in Italy," says Crescimbeni, while describing the beginning of Italian poetry, "was introduced for no other end than to please the beautiful women, who listened more willingly to the songs of their lovers when in their native tongue than in Latin." No doubt this was the *motif* of the troubadours, whose fantastic medieval worship of love and beauty caught like fire wherever they strayed, and became a fashion, like their embroidery and quaint jerkins, among all the golden youth. But other emotions were bursting into voice as well — religion as impassioned as earthly love, and more real. How could the awful Latin, language of highest rite and mystery, serve the eager purpose of Francis in

his cell at Assisi, unlearned and simple, with so much to say to the people round him, who knew no Latin any more than he himself did? The wild, quavering, primitive measure of St Francis's famous Canticle is enough to show in how elementary a stage was this popular unwritten poetry in its beginning; and had a Homer or a Chaucer developed out of this chaos, weaving heroic legends into consistency, singing the story of a crusade, as Tasso did afterwards, or shaping into epic completeness that tale of Lancelot and Ginevra which already existed in germ, nothing more natural could have been. But it was not this natural evolution that happened. As a matter of fact, the history of the imagination does not move by rule, as a mental process ought; and it was not by following, gathering up, amplifying, and setting in order the legendary lore and nascent poetry about him, that Dante created "the vulgar tongue" into a noble literary language. The manner in which he did this—giving to modern literature a new beginning and fresh starting-point independent of, and distinct from, the classic—will be shown, according to the best ability of the writer, in the following pages. What an entirely new idea it was, unfamiliar to the minds of his contemporaries, and unlikely of success, according to all their canons, may be proved even from his own works. His little treatise 'Sul Volgare Eloquio,' written in Latin for the benefit, no doubt, of those who held the contrary opinion, is an attempt to prove, by force of a simple downright argumentation, more remarkable for its intense directness and single-hearted unity of purpose than for force of reason, the uses of "the vulgar tongue," and the necessity for employing it. It is "more

noble," he asserts, than "that which the Romans call *grammatica*," from the fact that it is the first which we all use "in imitation of our nurse," and that it is natural; whereas the other must be acquired by time and assiduous study. But even in this elaborate argument there is a half-tone of apology. Granting that it might be permissible enough to sing love-songs or even hymns in the vulgar speech, the world had still to be taught that such an everyday medium was good enough for high themes of imagination and divine philosophy; and this was the first effectual lesson which Dante impressed upon the mind of his time. The literature of Italy was founded upon his great poem, still its noblest work. And indirectly by forming and giving dignity and worship to one European language, he emancipated all. The father of modern literature has thus an inalienable right to take the lead in the great line of writers who have made the countries of Christendom known to each other, and who furnish at once the clearest and surest revelation of the races in whose hands, for the last five hundred years, has lain all the progress of the world.

The translations in English of the 'Divine Comedy' are numerous. Perhaps the best known, and the one which has held its ground most steadily, is that of Cary, which, though somewhat turgid in its long strain of blank verse, and giving no idea of the triple rhyme of the original, is in the main good and faithful. Other translations, each with its excellent points, have been made by Messrs Wright, Cayley, Rossetti, and recently by Mr Longfellow and Mrs Ramsay. Most striking of all is the literal prose translation of Dr Carlyle, who unfortunately has not gone beyond the "Inferno." It is from

the latter that all the prose quotations from the first portion of the poem in this volume are made. For those in the original rhyme, the present writer is herself responsible.

The 'Vita Nuova' has been translated admirably by Mr Theodore Martin and Mr Dante Rossetti, from whose versions the extracts in Chapter II. are taken, with a few exceptions. The initials of each translator will be attached to the sonnets. Those unsigned are by the writer.

We are not acquainted with any translations in English of the prose works.

CHAPTER I.

HIS LIFE.

DANTE ALIGHIERI was born at Florence in the month of May in the year 1265, of a family not illustrious, yet occupying a place among the nobility, by right, it would appear, of the knighthood of an ancestor who was a Crusader under the Emperor Conrad; and which was sufficiently important to have already twice suffered banishment when the Ghibelline party, to which they were opposed, got the upper hand. In the usual confusion of names common to this period of Italian history, when the primitive mode of nomenclature, "John the son of Peter," seems to have been that most generally adopted by all but the great houses, it is somewhat difficult to make out why this family should have adopted the name of Alighieri, which came from the maternal side. Probably the lady who first introduced it, the wife of Dante's great-great-grandfather above mentioned — Cacciaguida, who occupies an honourable place in the "Paradiso,"—was of a race more eminent than that into which she married, and it was a distinction to her children to boast themselves *degli* Alighieri, of the Alighieris—as one would say, of the Howards—a custom still existing in Italy,

where a man thus nobly descended is permitted to add the distinction of this "of the" nobler race, to his own family name. The name of Dante, famed above all titles or nobility whatsoever, was the poet's Christian name, or rather the abbreviation of his Christian name, which was Durante—as if we should call our Shakespeare "Will," with no cognomen added. The poet was born in the very heart of the civic strife which always prevailed in Florence, his father being, it is believed, in banishment—one of the *fuori-usciti*, the turned-out ones, as they were called with picturesque intensity—at the time of his birth. This misfortune happened periodically to all the notable persons in Florence, according as Guelf or Ghibelline, White or Black, the nobles or the people —as the pertinacious quarrel fluctuated, changing perpetually, yet always the same—prevailed. This, however, did not affect the education of the young Alighieri, who was well trained according to the fashion of his time under the care of the famous Brunetto Latini, and with much promise of future eminence. He learned Latin, the language of all culture at the time, and even, it is believed, a little Greek, and the scholastic philosophy of his age, and grew up an accomplished young gallant, full of faculty and ambition. The earlier part of his life is related to us in visionary detail, on its visionary side, in the 'Vita Nuova,' the story of his love, which was the chief inspiration and key-note of his poetry, if not of his entire existence. It is impossible, indeed, to know anything of Dante, either as a man or a poet, without knowing Beatrice, the one love of his life. Even if it might be only the arbitrary whim of his genius to make her the centre of his spiritual world, he has done it so

effectually, that without her he can be but faintly seen, and not at all understood; and there is no real ground for supposing this, or for withdrawing from the beautiful Florentine lady the noblest and most faithful homage which man has ever paid to woman. As it will be necessary to enter into this wonderful tale in the following chapter, which will treat of the 'Vita Nuova,' we must not touch upon it here, further than to say, that even while his heart and life were absorbed in that ideal world, no sentimental weakness ever shows in Dante, nothing that could keep him from that share in the public life of his generation which became a young man of spirit and genius in a community where, more than in almost any other on record, individual character and power asserted themselves.

Florence was exceptionally peaceable through his earlier days—the Guelf party, to which his family belonged, having the unquestioned mastery; and it was only after Dante had reached maturity, when the heavenly mists of the 'Vita Nuova' were beginning to disperse, that the Guelfists themselves, weary of too much concord, began to split into parties and struggle with each other with all the fervour of fraternal hatred. Before that period he had fought at the battle of Campaldino, and had been present at the siege of Caprona, the only two warlike incidents of the time; and when the civic struggle recommenced, Dante soon became visible among his contemporaries, taking the Liberal side of the white party against that of the black—the old Conservatives, so to speak, of the Guelf faction. About three years after the death of Beatrice, he married Gemma Donati, about whom absolutely nothing is known, though some of his later

biographers have gone out of their way to speak ill of her. But from this time until the moment of his exile the poet would seem to have been merged in the citizen. He threw himself into public life with all the energy of his nature, and held several public offices in succession, especially that of ambassador, representing the Republic in various important missions; and at length reached the highest office in the State, and became one of the Priors or supreme rulers of Florence in the year 1293. This elevation lasted only for the short time of two months, according to the jealous custom of Florence; but it proves that Dante had gained the highest consideration in the city, and was one of the notable personages of the period. One of the acts of the Government while he held office was a bold attempt to make peace in the city by banishing the heads of both parties,—a novelty in Florentine politics; and Dante's influence seems to have been entirely patriotic and impartial, his beloved friend Guido Cavalcanti having been one of the belligerents thus banished. It seems, however, to have been a peculiarity of Florentine statesmen that a certain sentiment of patriotism or sense of responsibility made their course of action more honourable and dignified in office than out of it—authority apparently having the good effect of taming, in the greater minds at least, the heat of faction, into which they relapsed again on resigning the active conduct of the State.

The times, however, became more and more stormy, and at last a new revolution undid all that had been done by the long interval of peace. Dante was engaged on an embassy to Rome when the storm burst in the year 1301, and he never returned to the city which he loved so

dearly. Whether he had any premonition of the evil days that were coming, or any fear that he might not be permitted to return to his home, we have no means of telling. He had attained high importance and influence; but he had also, it would appear, made many enemies, being a man of imperious character as well as of lofty genius, and in both senses impatient of the common crowd with all their self-seeking and petty motives. Several stories are told of him, especially by Boccaccio, which indicate a certain scornful indifference as to whether the people surrounding him knew or not his sense of superiority to them. For example, he was overheard to say, when there was question of some embassy, "If I go, who will remain? and if I stay, who will go?" showing a contempt of his fellows which a popular assembly was little likely to brook. Another story that is told of him (and told by a contemporary as one of the chief causes of his banishment) is curiously characteristic. He was requested, it is said, to intercede with one of the magistrates, who was his friend, for a young gallant of the Adimari family who had got himself into some petty scrape. It occurred to Dante, however, while on his way upon this friendly office, to reflect upon the general conduct of the young man, which was so rude, presumptuous, and unmannerly as to have produced many previous breaches of the laws of the Republic more serious than the trifling one which had got him into trouble. This did not lead the poet to abandon his mission, but modified it strangely. He went on in his abstract way—"I have come to intercede for young Adimari, he is a neighbour of mine," he said; and without other preface proceeded to set forth to the astonished magistrate the more serious faults of the young reveller,

"But this is much worse than his original offence," cried the judge. "That is your affair," said Dante. "He is my neighbour, I commend him to you." The consequence was, that the young gallant had a much heavier instead of a lighter sentence, though the poet thought no more of it. The story deserves to be true, so characteristic is it of the visionary straightforwardness of the man.

Whether it was for personal reasons such as this, or for more purely political motives, it is certain that there was quite a special inveteracy in the condemnation of Dante. He was sentenced to be burnt if taken — an unusual aggravation; and all his passionate and often-repeated efforts never got him again within the gates, which were thus rigorously shut against him. From the moment of his sentence he never relinquished this attempt. Night and day he would seem to have thundered at those closed gates, seeking admittance by fair means or foul, appealing with sufficiently little discrimination to every possible saviour. The emperor, the adventurer, the chances of war, the papal advocate for peace—the exile was not too proud to seek the assistance of all these in turn; but none of them were successful. The only possibility of return which was ever within his reach came in the later years of his banishment, when it was proposed to him to come back to Florence humbly as a penitent, making avowal of guilt—a humiliation to which Dante, by this time acknowledged as the great poet of Italy, would not submit. Thus it happened that he remained *fuori*, "outside," all the rest of his life, joined now and then by his elder children, but never again possessing a settled home.

This life of exile and disappointment was not, it may be supposed, a happy one. He has himself described, in

the stinging brevity of an allusion here and there in his great poem, how bitter it was to eat the bread of others, and to go up and down the *scale* or stairs (an expression always believed to refer to the Della Scala family, in which he had found one of his most powerful patrons) of a stranger's bounty. This sharp suggestion of reproach, if really intended, as all the commentators upon Dante believe it to have been, has the cruel keenness in it of that revenge which a dependent and obliged person has it in his power to take for unconsidered slights—perhaps the bitterest and most wounding of all revenges. It was during this time of exile, however, that the great work of Dante's life was done. He had begun his "Comedy" (for the title of "Divine" is of later date), Boccaccio says, during his period of prosperity, in Latin, the legitimate vehicle, as everybody thought, for dignified composition; and he is supposed to have completed the first seven cantos of the "Inferno" before his banishment. All that is known of this, however, is the first three lines, which are halting enough. It was not till some years after (according to Boccaccio's story), that the manuscript of this unsuccessful beginning was found in one of the receptacles into which Dante's wife had hastily thrown the valuables of the family when sentence was pronounced against her absent husband. The bundle of papers caught the eye of a young spectator, Dante's nephew, himself disposed to rhyming; and by his means this first essay was sent to the poet, who had for the moment taken refuge in the castle of a friendly Baron Malaspina, in Lunigiana. The five years which had elapsed before this precious packet reached him had been spent partly in wild rushing to and fro, embassies here and there to seek help for himself and his brother exiles, conspiracies

and attempts of all kinds to get back to Florence; and partly—with an impatient sickening of these less noble occupations, which is apparent by intervals in all his after-life—in Bologna, where he recommenced the graver studies of his youth, read philosophy, and is believed to have written two of his prose works, the 'Convito' and the treatise 'Sul Volgare Eloquio.' Bologna too, however, shared the vicissitudes of the time, and a revolution in her government made her no longer an asylum for the banished Florentines, who could no more settle where they liked, even "outside," than they could get back to their homes. Dante, we are told, received his manuscript, which he had thought lost, as a special indication from heaven that the work was to be continued and completed; and he immediately recommenced the composition, using this time, however, the Volgare, the common Italian mother-tongue. The story is told by Boccaccio, his contemporary, who quotes the beginning of the eighth canto, *Io dico seguitando*, which may be freely translated "I resume," as a proof that the work had been here interrupted; and, so far as we are aware, there is no reason for doubting Boccaccio's narrative of events which must have been generally known in his time.

Many vicissitudes and many wanderings occurred after this in the poet's life. He would appear to have finished the 'Inferno' in Malaspina's castle among the hills, and he left the completed manuscript with the prior of the convent of Santa Croce del Corvo, near Spezia, when apparently on his way to Paris, where he spent two years in great poverty, studying at the Sorbonne. At the end of this dim and peaceful period, however, the accession of the new Emperor Henry VII.

seemed to afford a new hope for the exiles, and Dante rushed back to Italy to stir up his brothers in banishment, and to address impassioned appeals to the monarch, who had it in his power to open Florence to them, and reinstate them in their rights, as they fondly hoped. The changes wrought by time and trouble, and those strange new companions with whom misfortune makes us acquainted, which had converted a born Guelfist into a Ghibelline, relying utterly upon the emperor, had been long at work upon Dante's mind; but our space forbids any discussion of the differences between those two parties, which have produced as many books as they did wars, and in which few of our readers, we believe, will take any very lively interest. Those who do, will find abundant means of studying the question in other ways. The emperor was willing enough to interfere — very willing, indeed, to establish a power of arbitration and partial sovereignty over the great independent cities who owned allegiance to no king—but his power was not equal to his will; and though he was able temporarily to restore the exiles of some other small towns (until his back was turned, when they were re-banished summarily), he could not even succeed to this extent in Florence. And thus Dante's last hope of triumphant restoration came to an end.

It was after this that he took up his residence at Verona, in the palace of the Scaligeri or Della Scala family, with the splendid young prince called Can' Grande—Cane the Great—whom the poet loved deeply, and quarrelled with bitterly, but never, it would seem, ceased to love. He was received here with open arms, and treated at first with the greatest honour, but either

fell from favour on account of his uncourtierlike independence and pride, or at least thought he did so; and after some painful preliminaries of recrimination and mutual wounding, such as so often mark the breaking of a friendship, went away into the coldness of the outer world again, sore and bitter, directing his fierce counterthrust about the *scale*, which it was so hard to go up and down, even from the blessed circles of his "Paradise." His last host, who seems to have been a most generous one, was the Lord of Ravenna — Guido da Polenta. Even there, at the last, a lingering fancy seemed to have remained in his mind—half a hope—that he might still be recalled to Florence, and receive the laurel crown of supreme poetic fame within the walls of his beloved San Giovanni, the solemn and beautiful old church now known as the Baptistry, in which he and all Florentines after him have been baptised. Florence, however, obstinately and bitterly rejected, to his latest breath, the poet who is her greatest glory, and he died at Ravenna in the year 1321, aged fifty-six, and still lies there, the people of Ravenna having indignantly rejected the tardy inclination of the Florentines to do honour to their greatest countryman. Dante Alighieri, so much as remains of his mortal frame, is an exile still.

But it is with Florence that his memory is linked, as it is Florence that is foremost in all that he has done. He himself, in his fantastic, visionary, poetic youth, is not more clearly revealed to us in the lovely phantasmagoria of the 'Vita Nuova,' than is the dream-city, all in a dimness and haze of sunshine, where Beatrice, "the youngest of the angels," moves silent in her white robes. Florence is the scene and background of this delicate

picture. When Beatrice dies, "How doth the city sit solitary!" are the words that burst from the mourner's lips. And in the graver and greater poem of his mature life, Florence is the key-note of every strain. Heaven and hell, and the hopeful sadness of the green slopes between, are all crowded with Florentines. There is talk of the city in the highest circles of heaven, where blessed spirits, with the sound of tears in their voice, denounce her for very love of her, rather than leave in silence her beloved name. We are never allowed to forget the Tuscan town, in which all the universe seems to take a burning interest, whose vices convulse the spiritual world, and whose inhabitants are to be found everywhere. Though half of his manhood was spent in banishment from her dear walls, and his bones are laid far from the Arno, yet it is impossible to dissever Florence from Dante, or Dante from Florence. They are united more closely than any bridegroom and bride.

The prose works of Dante were all written after his banishment. The 'Convito,' the 'Discourse upon the Use of the Vulgar Tongue,' the 'Treatise on Monarchy,' are the chief of these works. They will be always interesting to the student, as showing the mind of the poet in other ways of working than that most congenial to him; but we do not think they will ever be found to possess great attractions of any kind for the general reader. They will, however, along with the greater productions of his genius, be noticed briefly in another chapter.

CHAPTER II.

THE 'VITA NUOVA.'

THE 'Vita Nuova' is Dante's earliest work. The period to which it refers, and of which it is the detailed yet visionary history, was over before the graver affairs of life and the more solemn inspiration of his great work came upon him. It begins with his ninth year, and goes on to the twenty-seventh, thus embracing almost the entire period of his youth. We know nothing else of the kind in literature which can be placed by its side. It is a love-story, but such a love-story as never was written before or since—all visionary, yet all real—profound in passion and sincerity, yet fantastic as a dream. No book, probably, has ever been so much discussed. To some critics it has seemed an allegory from beginning to end, and these writers have found in the peerless Beatrice no true woman at all, but only an emblem of heavenly wisdom, the highest light and inspiration of the soul. This far-fetched theory we are fortunately not called upon to discuss; for we cannot believe that any new reader, approaching the wonderful tale with an unbiassed mind, could ever imagine a love so tremulous with delicate passion, so absorbing and all-pervading, to be directed to

an abstract quality. There is, however, a second question, when this is disposed of, which has excited many minds, and that is, whether the love of Dante for Beatrice was the mild worship of a Platonic affection, or the hotter and less reasonable love which in its force of passion appropriates to itself exclusively that divine name. Upon this subject almost every reader will form his own conclusion. The poet himself has so curiously combined the divers elements of the tale, mixing the artificial with the artless, the visionary with the real, and even throwing in here and there a suggestion of allegorical meaning, that it becomes difficult to claim any certainty for the impression made upon our mind, as against the impression made upon another, which may be entirely opposite. Whether it is the intention of the young lover to make us more sensible of the supreme elevation of his lady by keeping her purposely out of our reach, so that no profane fancy might guess at the state of her affections, or be able to discover whether she ever stooped from these ethereal heights to repay him so much as by a thought; or whether it is but the subliming influence of the age which received as a solemn doctrine that canon of chivalry by which the respectful adoration of a lady was made necessary to all true knighthood and manhood; or, finally, whether the real facts of the case are simply represented through the wonderful haze, dimness, and brightness of the scene,—it is difficult to tell. Our own opinion inclines towards the latter theory. In no other work that we can recall has the passion of love, which trembles in every word, ever been represented as so entirely separate from its object. The love of Dante lives upon no interchange of feeling, no meetings, no glances, no close con-

sorting; but is nourished by its own musings, its dreams, by the sight of her as she passes, her distant salutation, the beauty and glory of her being, unenhanced by any personal contact; and it is told, not to her ear, but in an exquisite confidence and trust in poetic sympathy to those other poet-souls who could understand this rapture of feeling. The dim, sweet vicissitudes of the tale, mystically intimated to us through a twilight of soft allusions, are no sooner experienced than they are woven into verse, to be sent to Guido Cavalcanti and the others of the brotherhood, who stand round in a hush and thrill of sympathetic spectatorship, watching every change of the delicate drama, not always understanding it, puzzled by times, as we are, by the discrepancy between those fantastic passionate refinements and their own ruder realisation of what love is. But there is not a word to imply that Dante ever had the courage to speak of love to Beatrice herself, or to aspire to any return of it from one whom he felt to be so far above him. She knew of it, as women still, in less romantic days, know now and then of the silent devotion of some man, too young, or too poor, or too humble, ever to approach them more nearly. The sentiment is not obsolete, though it has never produced another 'Vita Nuova.' It is love in its highest and most beautiful sense, but it is incompatible with any idea of marrying or asking in marriage; and even the pang with which the lover sees his lady another man's bride, is rather a wounded sense of some lessening of her perfection thereby than the ordinary pangs of jealousy. This is, of course, a sentiment incomprehensible to many minds, but it is not the less a real one on that account.

Dante and Beatrice lived in Florence within fifty yards of each other; they were neighbours from their childhood; they knew the same people, breathed the same air, moved about the same streets,—it was not possible that Beatrice, with all those gentlewomen about her, who sympathised with the young lover's visionary passion, and all those noble young troubadours, Guido and the rest, among whom his sonnets were handed about, should not be aware of the intense yet veiled adoration which followed her wherever she went; but if Dante ever told her of that love, the confession finds no place in the 'Vita Nuova.' There, she is only apparent to us through a haze of distance, passing in subdued angelic glory, bowing her gracious head sometimes, in a greeting which ennobled those who received it, like the salutation of a superior being, but taking no part except this lofty passive one in the course of affairs. The reader is like the populace, which the poet describes as hastening to the corners of the streets to look at her as she passes, saying, "This is no woman, but a beautiful angel." She is entirely raised above even the adoring record of her perfections. That is for the lover, for the spectators, who themselves worship in a far-off degree, but not worthy the look of the most gentle Beatrice. She passes on, "crowned and clothed with humility," always gracious, divinely courteous, but never brought to a standstill, or audibly to us letting drop one of those heavenly utterances which are too delicate for mortal ear. Afterwards she speaks when we reach the loftier regions of spiritual life, but never on earth or in Florence. The tale is of love, but not the love of two hearts approaching each other in a glow of mutual emotion. More deli-

cate, severe, high-fantastical as Shakespeare would have the lover's dreams, this wonderful story is of a love unshared, unanswered, yet undiscouraged, not only no response coming from the object of the passion, but no idea even or anticipation of reply.

We have the story of the first meeting of these two whose names were never henceforth to be sundered, from two sources—first from Dante himself, and again in the poetic narrative of so sympathetic a historian as Boccaccio. They met at a great entertainment given by Folco Portinari, the father of the child Beatrice, in his big palace round the corner, over the way from where the Alighieris lived, to which the little Dante accompanied his parents when he was nine years old. The 'Vita Nuova' begins with a description of this meeting:—

"Nine time already, since my birth, had the heaven of light returned to wellnigh the same point in its orbit, when to my eyes was first revealed the glorious lady of my soul, even she who was called Beatrice by many who wist not wherefore she was so called. She was then of such an age, that during her life the starry heavens had advanced towards the East the twelfth part of a degree; so that she appeared to me about the beginning of her, and I beheld her about the end of my, ninth year. Her apparel was of a most noble colour, a subdued and becoming crimson, and she wore a cincture and ornaments befitting her childish years. At that moment (I speak it in all truth) the spirit of life which abides in the most secret chamber of the heart began to tremble with a violence which showed horribly in the minutest pulsations of my frame. And tremulously it spoke these words—'*Ecce deus fortior me, qui veniens dominabitur mihi!* Behold a god stronger than I, who cometh to lord it over me!' And straightway the animal spirit who abides in the upper chamber, whither all the spirits of the senses

carry their perceptions, began to marvel greatly, and addressing itself especially to the spirits of vision, it spoke these words — '*Apparuit jam beatitudo vestra.* Now hath your bliss appeared.' And straightway the natural spirit, which abides in that part whereto our nourishment [1] is ministered, began to wail, and dolorously it spoke these words—'*Heu miser! quia frequenter impeditus ero deinceps!* Ah wretched me! for henceforth shall I be oftentimes obstructed!' From that time forth I say that Love held sovereign empire over my soul, which had so readily been betrothed unto him; and through the influence lent to him by my imagination, he at once assumed such imperious sway and masterdom over me, that I could not choose but do his pleasure in all things. Oftentimes he enjoined me to strive, if so I might behold this youngest of the angels—wherefore did I during my boyish years frequently go in search of her; and so praiseworthy was she, and so noble in her bearing, that of her might with truth be spoken that saying of the poet Homer—

'She of a god seemed born, and not of mortal man.'"

The second meeting, conscious on both sides, seems to have befallen as follows:—

"When so many days had passed away, after the vision of that most noble lady above recorded, as made up the exact measure of nine years, on the last of these days it came to pass that this wonderful lady appeared to me once more, arrayed in the purest white, between two noble ladies older than herself. And as she passed along the street, she turned her eyes towards the spot where I, thrilled through and through with awe, was standing; and by her ineffable courtesy, which now hath its guerdon in everlasting life, she saluted me in such gracious wise that I seemed in that moment to see beatitude in all its length and breadth. The hour her most sweet salutation reached me was certainly the ninth hour of that day: and forasmuch as this was the first

[1] The tongue.

time that words of hers had reached my ears, I was smitten with such delight that I broke away from the company I was in like a drunken man. And having retired within the solitude of my chamber, I sate me down to meditate upon that most courteous lady; and as I mused, a sweet sleep came over me, wherein a marvellous vision was presented to my eyes."

The vision is described in the sonnet that follows, so that it is unnecessary to give it twice, though this the poet does in detail, lingering over every word of the prolonged and mystic tale:—

"Then musing upon what I had seen, I resolved to make it known to the many famous poets of the time; and having erewhile proved myself to possess the art of discoursing in rhyme, I determined to make a sonnet, in which, saluting all that were under fealty to Love, and entreating them to expound my vision, I should relate that which I beheld in my sleep; and this was the sonnet that I made:—

"To every captive soul and gentle heart,
Into whose sight shall come this song of mine,
That they to me its matter may divine,
Be greeting in Love's name, our master's, sent!
A fourth part of the hours was nearly spent,
When all the stars of heaven most brightly shine,
When Love came suddenly before mine eyne,
Remembering whom with horror makes me start.
Joyful he seemed, and bore within his hand
My heart; while in his arms, and calmly sleeping,
My lady, folded in a mantle, lay.
He woke her, and she ate by his command
The burning heart, as though she feared her prey;
And then Love went his way, deject and weeping."

—M.

"This sonnet divides itself into two parts. In the first I send greeting and crave response; in the second I indicate unto what

response is to be made. The second part commences with the words—'A fourth part.'

"To this sonnet I received replies from many, and of various import, and among those who answered was he whom I call the foremost of my friends, who on this occasion wrote a sonnet beginning, '*Vedesti al mio parere ogni valore*,—All worth, unto my thinking, thou hast seen.' And our friendship may be said to date from the time when I sent this to him. The true meaning of my dream was not then perceived by any one, but now it is manifest to the most simple.

"From the time of this vision my natural spirit began to be obstructed in its working, forasmuch as my soul was wholly given up to thinking of this most gracious creature; whereby I fell ere long into a state of health so feeble and delicate, that my appearance caused much concern to many of my friends; while others, moved thereunto by malice, cast eagerly about to discover that which above all things I wished to conceal. And I, being well advised of the vile motive of their questionings, did by the prompting of Love, who counselled me in accordance with the dictates of reason, reply to them, that it was Love who had brought me to this pass; and this I said, because I bore in my looks so many of his marks, that the fact could not be concealed. And when they asked me, 'For whom are you so love-shaken?' I looked at them and smiled, and answered them not again."

After this it occurs to Dante to veil his devotion to Beatrice under an appearance of love to another—a somewhat doubtful expedient, which, however, he seems to have thought, in the strange subtility of his absorbed mind, quite justifiable; so much so, that when the first lady who acted as a screen to his worship of Beatrice left Florence, Love himself appeared to the poet in a dream, and recommended another for the same purpose—a recommendation so well followed out that trouble ensued.

Dante's attentions to this second "screen" were, it would seem, misconstrued, and the fair fame of the innocent third party was endangered. "The thing was spoken of by many in terms which passed the bounds of courtesy," he tells us, and he himself was accused of vicious behaviour. This slander came to the ears of "that most gentle being, who was the destroyer of every vice and the very queen of virtue," and a terrible punishment followed. "As she passed me on a time," says the unhappy lover, "she denied me that most gracious salutation which was my all-in-all of bliss." Here he pauses to enlarge upon what that salutation was to him. It was all the recompense, so far as appears, that he ever had for his love, yet it was enough not only to delight but to purify his adoring mind. "Whenever and wherever she appeared, in the hope of that priceless salute, I had no longer an enemy in the world, such a flame of charity was kindled in me, making me forgive every one who had done me any wrong;" and with his usual intensity and minuteness of subtle detail, he proceeds to describe how he felt "when she was on the verge of giving me her greeting,"—the quickened current that coursed through his veins, the concentration of his sight upon her and her only. "Whoso had wished to know and see Love, had only to look upon the tremor of my eyes." And "when this most sweet lady did actually vouchsafe her salute," words have no power to describe the intolerable rapture, in which his physical being seemed to be cast off like a dead thing, and his soul lost itself in very excess of happiness. Sometimes the bliss was greater than he could bear. Let the young reader imagine, then, what the youth's sensations were when Beatrice passed

him by without that sign of gracious amity. "Rushing away from the crowd, I sought a lonely spot wherein to bathe the earth with most bitter tears." Then after that first indulgence he retired to his own chamber, where his grief could flow forth unheard; and there, with his usual mingling of sacred and classical devotion, called alternately upon the Lady of Mercy, and upon Love, whose faithful servant he was. Here in his misery he fell asleep, "sobbing like a beaten child," and had a wonderful vision, in which Love appeared to him, sad and pensive, and uttering enigmatical speeches which Dante himself could not comprehend, but which seem to have some far-off reference to the death of Beatrice, that woe which was soon to darken earth and heaven. The practical result of the vision was, that Dante resolved, by the advice of Love, to throw aside all screens and pretences, and avow his true passion. Only through the direct mediation of Love himself, however, was the avowal to be made; and his heart, thus still restrained within the bonds of enigmatical utterance, poured itself forth in a song, which the lover commands "to seek out Love, and go with him where my dear lady is"—no meaner ambassador than the very god himself being worthy to treat with that supreme lady. The tumult and conflict in the poet's mind, however, now begins to rise into the following controversy:—

"After this vision which I have recorded," he says, "and having written the words that Love dictated to me, I began to be harassed by many and divers thoughts, by each of which I was sorely tempted; and in especial there were four among them that left me no rest. The first was this—'Certainly the lordship of Love is good, seeing that it diverts the mind from all mean things.' The second was this—

'Certainly the lordship of Love is evil, seeing that the more homage his servants pay to him, the more grievous and painful are the torments wherewith he torments them.' The third was this—'The name of Love is so sweet in the hearing, that it would not seem possible for its effects to be other than sweet, seeing the name must needs be like the thing named, as it is written, *Nomina sunt consequentiæ rerum* (Names are the consequents of things).' And the fourth was this—'The lady whom Love has chosen out to govern thee is not as other ladies, whose hearts are easily moved.' And by each of these thoughts I was so sorely assailed, that I was like unto him who doubteth which path to take, and wishing to go, goeth not."

After this self-conflict—in which, perhaps, we may divine some gleam of enlightenment on the part of the young lover, and of sense that he was spending the sweetness of his life for nought—there occurs one of the few things which can be called an incident in the visionary tale. One of his friends takes him to a place in which there is "a numerous assemblage of gentlewomen." "To what end are we come among these ladies?" Dante inquires. His friend makes a reply, in which the very soul of the troubadour's modification of chivalry seems to breathe,—"To the end that they may be worthily served." Upon which the following strange scene ensues:—

"They were assembled there around a gentlewoman who had that day been wedded; and such being the custom of the city, it was meet that she should be so attended on first taking her seat at table in the mansion of her new spouse: so that I, thinking to please my friend, resolved to stay and join with him in doing suit and service to those ladies. But no sooner had I come to this resolve than I felt a strange tremor in my left side, which spread apace over all my

body. Therefore I made a feint of leaning against a painting which covered the wall of the house, and fearing that my emotion might be observed, I raised my eyes, and looking towards the ladies, beheld among them the most gentle Beatrice. Straightway my spirits were so distraught by the vehemence of Love, on finding myself so near that most gentle lady, that nothing remained to me of life but the spirits of vision, and even these were driven forth from their own organs, forasmuch as Love determined to occupy their most honoured place that he might behold that admirable lady. . . . Then many of these ladies, observing my confusion, began to marvel; and they fell to whispering with that sweet lady and making mock of me: whereupon my friend, taken quite aback, and at a loss what to understand, took me by the hand, and leading me aside, asked me what was amiss. Then having rested awhile, and the spirits which had died within me having risen to life again, and those which had been chased away having returned to their abodes, I made answer to my friend,—'I have set my foot in that path of life, to pass beyond which with purpose to return is impossible.' And bidding him farewell, I returned home into the chamber of tears, and there weeping, and blushing as I wept, I said to myself,—'If this lady did but know my condition, she would not thus, methinks, make sport of my appearance; rather would she, I believe, be moved to pity.'"

This is supposed by many commentators to refer to the marriage-feast of Beatrice herself; but this seems very improbable, since no friend of Dante's is likely to have led him unawares into the heart of such a merry-making. Much more likely it would seem that the young poet, suddenly brought into immediate contact with the lady whom he had worshipped afar off, should be rendered speechless by the unsuspected shock of a privilege too much for him, and of which he could take

no advantage, surrounded as both were by that bevy of smiling ladies, ready to flout and mock his too great timidity. It is much more reasonable to suppose that the trick played upon him went no further than an innocent conspiracy to introduce him suddenly into the presence of the object of his fanciful adoration. That he should be completely overcome by love and awe and shamefacedness is quite natural, and in keeping with the delicacy of his passion, and especially that any appearance on the part of Beatrice of joining in the laugh against him should have cut him to the quick. When he is back again in the "chamber of tears," he knows very well, poor lover, what to say, and pours forth another sonnet full of impassioned remonstrance:—

. . . . . .

"For when Love finds me near thee, he so high
Dominion takes and scornful mastery,
That on my trembling spirits straight he flies,
And some he slays, and some he drives away,
Till he alone remains to gaze on thee.
Thence am I changed into another's guise;
Yet not so changed, but that the pangs with me,
Which tortured so those exiled spirits, stay."

—M.

In the explanation which follows, and which is attached to every sonnet with quaint force and iteration, he thus, with luminous mystical irradiation of commentary, makes clear, or thinks he makes clear, the dimness of the text:—

"*In the passage where I explain the circumstance which gave rise to this sonnet, there are some ambiguous expressions—those, I mean, where I say that Love slays all my spirits, and that those of vision remain in life, though extraneously to their organs.*

Now this is ambiguous, and impossible to explain to any one who is not in like degree the liegeman of Love; but to those who are, the meaning of these ambiguous words is obvious."

Delightful interpretation, full of character and truth! for is not every wonder an open secret—clear and evident to those who know, unexplainable to all others? But fortunately Love enlists his liegemen in all classes and ages; and there are few, we believe, to whom this sublime of explanations will not convey some glimmering of what the poet meant.

Two other sonnets, each with its commentary, follow, in something of the same strain of remonstrance and personal appeal; and then the strain changes. Not yet, it would seem, if ever, had the salutation which he prized so highly been restored to him; and the next step in the tale brings us into a company of noble Florentine ladies, and reveals, like a scene out of one of the dim beautiful frescoes still existing, a new-old society, in quaint rich robes, with a quaint openness of subtle talk. Thus the queens of love and beauty in the fantastic Provençal courts of love might have interrogated a young troubadour:—

"Through the changes in my looks the secret of my heart was now known to many; and certain ladies, to whom it was well known (they having often seen how sorely troubled I was), had met together on a day, drawn by their delight in each other's society. Happening to pass that way, led, as it were, by happy chance, one of these ladies called to me to approach. She who so called me was very gay and pleasant of discourse; so when I came in among them, and saw that my most gracious lady was not there, I recovered my courage, and, saluting them, inquired what might be their pleasure. There were many ladies there, some of whom were laughing among themselves, whilst others regarded me

as if in expectation of what I should say. Others there were who talked together, of whom one, turning her eyes on me, and calling me by name, addressed me thus: 'Unto what end lovest thou this lady, seeing her mere presence overwhelms thee? Tell us, for of a surety the end and aim of such a love must be of a new kind.' And when she had thus spoken, not only she, but all the others, fixed their eyes upon me, awaiting my reply. Thereupon I made answer: 'The end and aim of my love hath until now been the salutation of this lady, of whom belike you speak, for in that salutation I found the happiness which was the goal of all my wishes. But since it pleaseth her to deny it to me, Love, my liege lord, in guerdon of my fealty, has placed all my happiness in something which can in no wise fail me.' Thereupon these ladies fell to conversing among themselves; and as we sometimes see rain falling mingled with beautiful snow, so did their words appear to me intermingled with sighs. And when they had talked together for a time, the same lady who had questioned me before, spoke to me in these words: 'Tell us, we pray thee, wherein abides this happiness of thine?' And I made answer, 'In the words which praise my lady.'"

This would seem to have been a sudden inspiration called forth by the questioning, but the poet goes away from those sympathetic inquisitors with his head full of the new thought. Since there is such happiness in praising her, why has he ever employed otherwise his gift of song? He determined accordingly that this, and this only, should be his future theme—then was struck by fear that the undertaking was too great for him, and so wavered "between desire to speak and fear to begin." At last, one day, when walking by a clear-flowing stream, the needful inspiration came. Poets understand each other. So Burns says, little thinking of the Italian youth, long mouldered into dust—

" The muse a poet never fand her,
Till by himself he learned to wander
Adown a flowing burn's meander."

Dante, musing along the pleasant way, with the clear stream singing by him, found the key-note he wanted; and thus began, in melodious sublimation of the theme, through which, consciously or not, the forebodings of great love—always so near the heart when its passion is deepest — steal in like a solemn second, deepening and enriching the happier strain :—

" Ladies who have intelligence in love,
I would speak of my lady to your ear,
Though well I know her sum of praise could ne'er
Be ended; but to give some utterance meet
To ease the mind—I say her worth above
All other greatness fills me with such fire
Of love, that did not failing forces tire
Speaking, I should bring all men to her feet.
Not now in such a lofty guise I treat;
Lest all too mean for song so high I prove,
But rather of the gentle state I love,
With softer tones will sing, oh ladies sweet,
Ladies and maidens gentle-souled, as who
Could speak on such a theme to only you.

An angel of divine intelligence
Lifts up his voice and says, 'Sire, on this earth
Such wondrous light from one of mortal birth
Shines forth that all below resplendent glows.
Heaven nothing lacks but this, nor can dispense
With her; and thus upon the Lord we call
To grant her to us, saints and angels all.'
Pity alone some pleading for us shows,
And God replies, who best my lady knows,
'My dearly-loved, have patience till descends

Th' appointed hour. On earth is one, attends
Her loss with trembling—he who 'mid the woes
Of the ill-born shall pass through deepest hell,
And "I have seen the hope of saints" shall tell.'

My lady thus is longed for in high heaven,
And of her power this I would have you know,
Who would be noble known, with her should go;
For when she passes forth upon the way,
All evil hearts are from her presence driven,
And in her eyes pure love indignant chills
Ill thoughts, and every foulness binds or kills.
Noble must he become who dares to stay
And gaze on her; or die; and whoso may
Worthy behold her, proves her greatness more.
If she salutes him, all his being o'er
Flows humbleness that bears all wrath away;
And yet a higher grace does God confer—
He never will end ill who speaks with her.

Love says of her, can anything that lives
So fair adornèd be and yet so pure?
Then looks at her, and swears that, true and sure,
Great God of her a new creation makes.
Pale as a pearl she is; paleness that gives
A woman grace, yet not too pale a hue.
In her is seen what Nature all can do;
Her for most high example Beauty takes.
Within her sweet eyes, as she moves, there wakes
Such gleam and glow of love, so warm and bright,
As dazzles gazing eyes and kindles light
And warmth in every heart whereon it breaks.
Love in her lovely smiling, pictured lies;
But who can gaze on it with steadfast eyes?

Song, well I know thou wilt go forth and talk
With many ladies, when thou art despatched;
I warn thee, I who trained thee and have watched
Thy growth, a young and modest child of love,

Where'er thou comest ne'er thy mission balk,
But say, 'Speed thou me on, my charge is this,
To reach her feet whose praise my treasure is.'
Yet if thou wouldst delay, be still above
Such weakness as to rest with hearts that rove
In paths ignoble; let thy heart be shown
Solely to ladies sweet, and men who love,
Who, courteous, the quick path will speed thee on
To where she sits, and with her Love alway.
Ah then, my song, commend me as thou may."

A short time after this the father of Beatrice, Folco Portinari, of whom we have already heard, died. She herself had been married some time before to Simone dei Bardi (of the family which, the reader will be pleased to recollect, afterwards produced Romola, by grace of God and of George Eliot). It was the custom, Dante tells us, that in times of grief men and women mourned apart; and accordingly, Beatrice was attended in her affliction by "many ladies," the companions by whom she is always surrounded through the tale. It would seem that the poet himself kept lingering about the doors of the closed house, with a natural longing to be near her in her grief, and to hear of her, though incapable of giving her any consolation. "Where I sat," he says, "her friends passed continually in and out, and as they passed, I could hear them speak concerning her, how she wept." As two of these ladies came out talking of their friend, one said to the other, "She grieves so, that one is like to die of pity." At this the young man, half hidden by some friendly pillar, felt the tears rush to his eyes, and hastily covered his face with his hands that no one might see them; and he would have gone away, "to be alone," most likely to that chamber of tears which he had filled

with so many thoughts of Beatrice, but that he hoped to hear more. By-and-by another group came past with the same murmurs of reverential sympathy. "Which of us can be glad any more who have heard her talk so piteously?" they said. This evidently produced in the poet a new outburst of grief, for they then transferred their regards to him, saying among themselves, "He that sits there could not weep more had he seen her as we have done;" and, "he is so altered that he does not seem himself." And still, as the ladies went and came, "I could hear them speak thus" (with a certain satisfaction and pleasure in the conjunction) "of her and of me." "Wherefore afterwards," he adds, with that curious recollection and presence of mind in the midst of his self-abandonment, which is at once so artless and so quaintly artificial, "having considered, and perceiving that there was herein matter for poetry, I resolved that I would write certain rhymes in which should be contained all that these ladies had said." Two sonnets follow which we need not quote.

Shortly after, Dante himself fell ill—so ill as to be reduced to great weakness after serious suffering, and on the ninth day of his sickness (for everything is regulated by this mystic number), being very ill, thoughts of death came into his mind. But these thoughts were not of his own death, which would have been sufficiently natural. What was he, that any one should think of his living or dying? The thought that rushed upon him with all the force of a revelation was that some time or other "the very gentle Beatrice must die." Notwithstanding the visionary gleam of this possibility which appears in the *canzone* above quoted, where the angels

ask for her, and God Himself leaves her on earth only for the sake of "one who dreads to lose her," yet it is evident that this sudden realisation of the inevitable drove Dante into a panic of despairing passion. His confused imagination began to work "like that of a frantic person." He seemed to see visions, faces of women who said to him, "thou shalt die;" faces more horrible, which said, "thou art dead." The sun seemed to him darkened, the stars as if they wept — great earthquakes heaved and rumbled round, and the birds fell dead about him; and in the midst of all this tumult and terror appeared a friend who said, "Knowest thou that thy excellent lady has departed out of this world?" Then, in the relieving of the brain which came by tears, the dreamer looked up and saw heaven opened, and a multitude of angels returning there preceded by a white cloud of wonderful brightness; upon which, his imagination once more dropping earthward, he seemed to be transported into the room where Beatrice lay dead. The confusion and bewilderment of his fever are strangely mingled in this vision with the master-thought of his life, which thus forcibly makes itself the centre of every new condition of mind and being. The mournful fancy goes on so long as this feverish sleep or swooning lasts. He sees her laid out for her grave, her face covered with a white veil. He sees in the dead countenance such an aspect of unspeakable sweetness, that it seemed as though she said, "I have attained to look on the beginning of peace." Then he calls upon Death with such beseeching, that "the young and gentle lady" (whom he explains to be very nearly related to him) who sat by his bedside watching him, was overcome by the sight, and began to weep, and the attention of the other attendants

in the room was drawn to his condition. They woke him while he was in the act of saying, "Oh, Beatrice!" though his voice was so broken that they could not distinguish what he said; and the poet was consoled by finding it all a dream. After a while he tells what has happened to his sympathetic nurses, and finally weaves it into another song. Whether Beatrice had by this time shown symptoms of delicate health, or whether it was the mere foreboding of prescient love which made this dream so distinct and terrible, it is impossible to say.

The next scene is very different. Once more it is the dim, sweet world of the frescoes that opens upon us, and through the peopled space the poet sees, advancing towards him, a beautiful lady, Madonna Vanna, the beloved of Guido Cavalcanti, who had given her the name of Primavera, or Spring. After her, heralded by "the accustomed tremor" in his heart, came Beatrice, "each by the side of the other a miracle" of beauty and grace. As these two fair and sacred creatures passed him by, it suddenly occurred to Dante why the lesser wonder of the two should be called Primavera. Was she not, like spring, the harbinger of summer, as she went along, a little in advance of her heavenly companion? an office also expressed in her other name, Giovanna, which is derived from that John who preceded the True Light. This also, it is needless to say, was made into a sonnet, and specially sent to Guido Cavalcanti, whose heart was full of this beautiful precursor, as Dante's was of the still more perfect Beatrice. "This is Spring; and the name of the other is Love."

Thus dreaming dreams and seeing visions—now of Love himself, the youthful god, now of that fair representative

of his, supreme above all women—the visionary tale flows on. By right of her own superlative grace, and by right, too, we seem to perceive, of that poetic adoration of which all the neighbourhood had become aware, Beatrice acquired, in her young lover's thoughts at least, a kind of divinity in Florence. The people came to the corners of the streets to see her pass. "When she drew near any one, a feeling of reverence so profound came over his heart, that he had no courage to raise his eyes." When they looked at her, "men felt within them an inexpressible sweetness and elevation; nor was it possible for any one to look upon her but straightway a sigh arose from his heart." The poet never tells us that this universal homage was in any degree the result of his own perpetual adoration, or that Beatrice had been made into a queen and goddess in all men's eyes by the young worshipper, ever on his knees before her; but there is an exquisite inference, delicate and subtle, of satisfaction in the universal homage, which seems to point to this. "The excellent lady of whom I spake . . . became an object of so much interest." "This lady of my heart came to be so highly esteemed." He must have felt that he had something to do with it, and the thought no doubt was sweet to him. Every thought of her calls forth a sonnet. He sees that her very companions are honoured for her sake, and he immediately weaves into shape a melodious scrap of song upon "the lady mine, with other ladies round." Another is devoted to that oft-lauded grace, "My lady's greeting," and all the wonderful attributes that were in it. Thus he goes about the dream-streets, his young soul rapt in this contemplation, his being thrilled through and through by the delight of seeing her

moving towards him in gracious sweetness, the only creature in Florence unaware of her own perfections, "crowned and clothed with humility;" or when the thoughts become too big to keep silent, betakes him to his chamber to write down the glowing words, and explain and dwell upon them, ringing the changes upon each intense minute detail. Thus he reached the very flower of his young manhood—not the less a man that he was so absorbed and adoring a lover. But his manhood, his fighting, his studying—all the other side of his life—is outside the 'Vita Nuova.' In this there is nothing but poetry, and the worship of that perfection of all womanhood, that embodiment of sweetness and purity and love.

One day he was sitting in his chamber, busy over another sonnet, and, it would seem, thinking no evil, when the thunderbolt out of a clear sky, the calamity which he had divined in those agonising gleams of foresight, suddenly, without apparent warning, fell upon him. He had begun to consider, he says, all that he had heretofore said of his lady, and found it defective and incomplete, especially those sonnets in which he had attempted to show the effect upon him of the sight of her, and the influence of her presence. "And not thinking that I should be able to say these things in the brief compass of a sonnet, I began a poem (*canzone*) thus:—

"So long has Love held sway complete,
So used me to his sovereign reign,
That though at first 'twas mickle pain,
Now in my heart I find it sweet.
Though from my life the strength is gone,
And all my forceful spirits flee,
Yet comforts he my soul in me

With gladness such as Death alone
Should purchase; and such power confers,
  That every sigh turns to a prayer,
  And flies, appealing, where
My lady is, for that dear grace of hers,
In mood so humble that 'tis strange to me;
And this befalls whene'er her face I see"—

So far had he got, untroubled, when all at once the strain breaks off, like a snapped thread, and a solemn line of Latin, abrupt and sorrowful, strikes across the fantastic sweetness of the mood, hushing alike the love and the song. "*Quomodo sedet sola civitas plena populo! facta est quasi vidua domina gentium! How doth the city sit solitary that was full of people! how is she become a widow, she that was great among the nations!*" Beatrice was dead.

"I was still occupied with this poem," he resumes, "having composed only the above stanza, when the Lord God of justice called my most gracious lady unto Himself, that she might be glorious under the banner of that blessed Queen, Mary, whose name had ever been held in highest reverence in the words of this blessed Beatrice."

This is the termination on earth of Dante's love-tale. His raptures, his tears, his ineffable youthful anguishes and consolations—all end under this overwhelming blow. The city is desolate that was full of people—that lovely, silent figure, neither with smile of gracious greeting, nor sweet sternness of angelical reproof, to be seen there any more for ever—the earth bereaved of her, and Florence, and her poet. This is the end of it; and yet not the end, but the beginning, as the discerning heart will see, and as time has proved. But against the grip of such a

despair not even the inspiration of genius is any safeguard, and Dante would seem to have been prostrated by the blow.

It was, however, the only legitimate and possible end for such a love. As the other love ends in marriage, so this developed, with that lofty kind of suitableness which is nature on such high levels, into the adoration, scarcely less distant, of a saint in heaven; and Madonna Beatrice, who never seems to have approached him nearer than in those passing encounters, whose presence so abashed him as to take away all power of speech, whose very approach was indicated to him by a tremor of all his being, became his, in a sweet, ineffable alliance, accepting and acknowledging in heaven the visionary tie which on earth had no existence. To such an ethereal adoration—so pure, so hopeless of any mortal recompense, so absorbing and so impossible—the only real climax was Heaven.

But in the meantime no immediate consolation came to the poet from this thought. With all the mysticism of his medieval mind, and in a distraction of grief that shows through the strange, fantastic, scholastic argument, he thinks it "right that he should say something" of "the number nine," which has often been mentioned in the preceding story, and which, he concludes, has also "borne a part in the manner of her death." In what way "this number was allied" to Beatrice he now proceeds to tell:—

"According to the division of time in Italy, her most noble spirit departed from among us in the first hour of the ninth day of the month; and, according to the division of time in Syria, in the ninth month of the year, seeing that Tismim, which with us is October, is there the first month. Also, she

was taken from us in that year of our reckoning (to wit, of the years of our Lord) in which the perfect number was nine times multiplied, within that century wherein she was born into the world, which is to say, the thirteenth century of Christians.[1] And touching the reason why this number was so closely allied to her, it may peradventure be this: According to Ptolemy (and also to the Christian verity), the revolving heavens are nine; and according to the common opinion among astrologers, these nine heavens together have influence over the earth. Wherefore, it would appear that this number was thus allied unto her for the purpose of signifying that at her birth all these nine heavens were at perfect unity with each other as to their influence. This is one reason that may be brought; but more narrowly considering, and according to the infallible truth, this number was her own self—that is to say, by similitude, as thus: The number three is the root of the number nine, seeing that, without the interposition of any other number, being multiplied merely by itself, it becomes nine, as we manifestly perceive that three times three are nine. ' Thus three being of itself the efficient of nine, and the great Efficient of miracles being of Himself three persons (to wit, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost), which being three are also one, this lady was accompanied by the number nine to the end, that men might clearly perceive her to be a Nine—that is, a miracle, whose only root is the Holy Trinity. It may be that a more subtle person would find for this thing a reason of greater subtlety; but such is the reason that I find, and that liketh me best."

The modern reader will have difficulty in believing that any "subtle person" could weave a wilder or stranger argument; but fantastic as it is, it is formal to the rules of thirteenth century reasoning, and solemn as the most sober appeal to the thoughtful mind. No doubt Dante derived some kind of superlative consolation from this mystic reckoning. He discourses of it

[1] She died on the 9th of June 1290.

with the gravest seriousness and profound good faith. In his next paragraph we are informed that the words quoted above, "*Quomodo sedet sola civitas*," were placed at the head of a letter which he had written to the principal persons of the city, treating of the desolation which had come upon them through the death of Beatrice. But whether this letter was a merely abstract and poetical address, or if these "principal persons" profited by it, we are not told. It is left out by reason of being written in Latin, the 'Vita Nuova' being entirely "in the vulgar tongue."

After these interruptions, nature has her way, and the heaviness of his grief falls like a pall over the poet. When he was so weary of weeping that he could no longer ease his sorrow by tears, it occurred to him that mournful words might do instead. Since the time when he wrote of Beatrice first to those "ladies who had intelligence in love," these gentle bystanders had been his chosen audience; and he now returns to them with sorrowful satisfaction, feeling that they can understand him best:—

"My mournful eyes, by sorrow of my heart,
So sore have grown with many a tear,
That worn out now they are, and dry;
And if to ease this pain is any art,
This grief that slowly, slowly to my bier
Leads me, then needful 'tis I speak or die.
Oh gentle ladies, while my lady here
Still lived, to you my songs were all addrest,–
I sought no other ear,
Save of the gentle heart in ladies' breast;
And now that she has reached another sphere,
And gone away to heaven all suddenly
From Love and me, thus, weeping sore, I say.

Beatrice is gone into the highest heaven,
That realm where angels live in peace most true,
And she with them, dear ladies, leaving you.
Not by the frost of winter was she driven,
Nor fainting 'neath great heats as others do,
But only by her own great perfectness;
Such shining went up from her humbleness,
As poured through heaven's gates in grace complete,
And woke such wonder in the Eternal Sire,
As moved Him to desire,
And to Himself call, so much goodness sweet,
Making her, here below, to Him aspire.
Because our life of pain and suffering
He saw unworthy of so fair a thing.
. . . . . .
Oh piteous song of mine, now go thou weeping
To all those ladies and those maidens sweet
Thy sister songs were wont to greet,
Bearing still gladness for their keeping;
But thou who art the child of melancholy,
Go, desolate, and stay thou with them wholly."

We have given only the beginning and ending of this mournful song, space forbidding the quotation of the entire poem; nor can we add the other sonnets which Dante wrote for (apparently) the brother of his dead lady, whom he calls "a friend whom I counted as second in the degrees of friendship," the first being Guido Cavalcanti. In these mournful exercises the first bitterness of grief was past; and the tale, now flagging after its great climax of sorrow, has little more to record. Here is, however, a very striking and often-quoted scene, showing the hush and stillness of contemplative grief after its edge has been blunted:—

"On that day which fulfilled the year since my lady had been made of the citizens of eternal life, remembering me

of her, as I sat alone, I betook myself to draw the resemblance of an angel on certain tablets. And while I did this, chancing to turn my head, I perceived that some were standing beside me, to whom I should have given courteous welcome, and that they were observing what I did; also I learned afterwards that they had been there awhile before I perceived them. Seeing whom, I arose for salutation and said, 'Another was with me.'

"Afterwards, when they had left me, I set myself again to my occupation—to wit, to drawing figures of angels; in doing which I conceived to write this matter in rhyme as for her anniversary, and to address my verses unto those who had just left me."

When the first year of mourning was accomplished, a strange incident, which between the sweetness of it and the shame of it went to the very heart of the poet, occurred to Dante. Finding himself in a spot which recalled the past, he fell a-musing sadly as he stood there, a thing not unusual to him; and his thoughts were so heavy and sad, that they betrayed themselves in his troubled countenance. Feeling this, he raised his eyes to look if any one observed, and suddenly was aware of a beautiful young lady at a window gazing at him with so much sympathy that the very soul of pity seemed to be in her eyes. This touched his own wounded spirit and brought him the relief of tears, and he turned away to conceal his sudden weeping, with tender gratitude in his heart; which he soon after expressed in a sonnet to the "Pitying eyes," which had looked so kindly on him. And though so faithful in his deepest heart to the lady whom he had worshipped so purely, Dante was young, and his heart was tender still. He came back to look again into those pitying eyes. A glance from them

brought tears into his own. She was pale, as also had been his own most noble lady, and he wrote another sonnet to her upon this spiritual paleness—the "Colour of Love," as he calls it. All this, the common spectator would say, tended to consolation and to the common vulgar end, which makes life as happy as possible with a substitute when the chief object of our desires is not to be attained. Dante himself soon felt the risk. "My eyes began to take too much delight in seeing her," he says—upon which he reproached those faithless eyes. "You who have made so many weep to see your grief, do you forget it now, when this lady looks at you, who looks at you only because of the glorious lady whom ye weep? Accursed eyes!" This draws forth another sonnet and many musings. His thoughts he felt were dwelling upon the compassionate one "too fondly"—until it even occurred to him that Love had thrown her in his way, that his life might find peace; and for the space of a sonnet, the poet seems to play with this idea. But suddenly one day at the ninth hour (as always) a "strong imagination" came and dispersed all these mists of fancy. He seemed to see his glorious Beatrice in the crimson robe which she had worn when he first saw her, and going back to his earliest worship, followed out step by step the tender story; so that all his thoughts returned to their most gentle lady, and the consolatrix was remembered no more.

Shortly after this return of his heart to its one love and contemplation, Dante saw a procession of pilgrims going along the chief street of Florence; and musing at them as they passed by, themselves also rapt in thought, there suddenly occurred to him the strange idea that these

pilgrims, having come from a far country, had perhaps never heard his lady's name, and did not know what a bereaved city this was through which they were passing. No doubt, he went on—with the simplicity of that wonder which a child would see to be vain, but which may yet strike the greatest mind—their thoughts were of other matters, perhaps of their own distant friends, who were equally unknown to the Florentine. "But could I have speech with them," the poet said to himself, "of a surety I would make them weep before they left this city." The suggestion prompted another sonnet, which was as follows:—

"Ye pilgrim-folk advancing pensively,
As if in thought of distant things, I pray,
Is your own land indeed so far away—
As by your aspect it would seem to be—
That this our heavy sorrow leaves you free,
Though passing through the mournful town midway,
Like unto men that understand to-day
Nothing at all of her great misery?
Yet if ye will but stay whom I accost,
And listen to my words a little space,
At going ye shall mourn with a loud voice.
It is her Beatrice whom she hath lost,
Of whom the least word spoken holds such grace,
That men weep hearing it, and have no choice."

—R.

Another sonnet ends the tale. In it the poet tells how his mind has travelled into heaven, where love recognises his lady in one whom saints adore; and beholding the wonders that surround her there, has need of such deep words to describe them as he himself cannot understand. Thus he gives a faint suggestion of the wonders which

he was afterwards to tell—a suggestion which is repeated with mystic solemnity in the paragraph which concludes the whole :—

"After writing this sonnet it was given to me to see a very wonderful vision, in which I saw things that made me determine to write no more of this dear saint until I should be able to write of her more worthily, and of a surety she knows that I study to attain unto this with all my powers. So, if it shall please Him by whom all things live, to spare my life for some years longer, I hope to say that of her which never yet has been said of any lady; and then, may it please Him who is the Lord of courtesy, to suffer my soul to see the glory of my lady, of that blessed Beatrice, who gloriously beholds the face of Him *qui est per omnia sæcula benedictus. Laus Deo!*"

Thus ends the mystic story of the poet's "new life"—not his life of youth only, but that existence transformed and transfigured by love which was at the same time different from, and yet the very soul and inspiration of, the common life which he shared with all his fellows. It is perhaps too serious, too intense in the strange strain of feeling, to be qualified as fantastic; and yet it is high-fantastical throughout, mingling intellectual conceits of the most artificial kind with artless passion, and an earnest reality too evident to be doubted, as perhaps only the Italian troubadour age, ringing strange and mystic changes upon the gay Provençal sentimentalities and the Teutonic creed of chivalry, could have done. More subtle than the Teuton, more grave than the Provençal, more religious than either, the Florentine makes his visionary love into the worship of moral beauty in its most exquisite development, without ever losing the personal in the abstract. His lady is not a tournament queen of love

and beauty, but an angelic presence, spotless from all earthly alloy, truest, purest, sweetest of created things, most pitiful, most courteous, yet with a heavenly severity of goodness in her, as incapable of approving what is evil as she is of anything but pity for the guilty—the embodiment of all purity and gentle wisdom, yet not a Virtue, always Beatrice, most loved and reverenced of women, yet a woman still. The curious, subtle, admirable art with which she is kept apart from us, yet ever real to us—surrounded with her body-guard of gentle ladies, never close enough to permit us even to glimpse the possibility of an imperfection, never placed in contact with anything that could stain, "the virgins, her companions," ever about her—is of itself one of the wonders of poetry. Beatrice is the centre of the mystic tale, yet we scarcely hear the sound of her footsteps and never of her voice; even the smile on her lovely face is an inference, though it lights all the subdued sweet atmosphere with a half-divine reflection. No one else, so far as we know, has ever thus accomplished the highest results of art with such a visionary exquisite vagueness, with an outline so veiled in mists of sacred awe and reverence. To every man and woman who has purely and truly loved, loved for love's sake, "all for love and nothing for reward," the 'Vita Nuova,' to the end of time, will be a revelation not only of Dante and the peerless Beatrice, but of themselves and their own hearts.

CHAPTER III.

THE 'DIVINE COMEDY:' THE "INFERNO."

THE INTRODUCTION INTO HADES.

THE origin of the 'Divine Comedy' has been already indicated in the preceding chapter, where twice over Dante himself gives a mysterious intimation of some work to be done by which Beatrice should be renowned as never lady was before. Before her death even, the reader will remember—and apparently before it had occurred to him that she herself, translated into the higher life, should be the chief figure in his poem—he represents himself as one who should pass through "among the ill-born in hell." From this the imagination might be permitted to divine that he had already at that early period begun to contemplate this first portion of his great work—a subject very attractive to the medieval mind, and which his classic guide and example in poetry, Virgil, had already entered upon. But before the young poet had gone farther than the sonnets of the 'Vita Nuova,' Beatrice died, and all the spiritual world widened and expanded around him. Not even then, however, was the work begun. It would be giving a false idea of Dante did we attempt to repre-

sent him as a visionary so raised above common life that the dream-world of the 'Vita Nuova' embraced his whole existence, even in his youth, or that there was no other side than this upon which to regard him. He was, it is very apparent, a man made up of various elements—harsh as well as sweet; like other men, full of the passions and ambitions of his age—no gentle dreamer, but a fierce Florentine, ready to fight, and not unready to love, in other and less stainless ways than that worship of Beatrice, which was, notwithstanding, the master-passion, the thread of nobler feeling through his life. Probably the idea of his great poem hung about him through the busy years, a grateful subject of thought to fall back upon in those moments when even the most occupied of men must be left alone with themselves, but not imperious enough to claim immediate execution when there were so many other things in hand. Boccaccio tells us that the first seven cantos of the "Inferno" were written in Florence before his exile, and in Latin; and one of the most distinguished of Dante's modern biographers, Balbo, has suggested that during the Jubilee year of 1300, when the poet was in Rome, in a moment of religious exaltation and excitement, the great project and the great sorrow of his life had so revived in his mind that he there and then began to write the long-thought-of, long-postponed work. This, of course, is mere conjecture; and the assertion of Boccaccio, though a contemporary, does not always carry conviction, at least to the mind of the learned; however, the question is one into which the reader will not care to enter. And in the meantime, though he leaves us in the dark as to all the surrounding circumstances, Dante himself informs us very distinctly at what period of his life

the great poem was begun. It was when he had attained his thirty-fifth year—the *mezzo del cammin*, middle of the road of life. He reached this age in the year 1300, the Jubilee year. The very day is indicated in the heart of the poem. It was Good Friday, the holiest day of the holy week, upon which his great trial and journey began. There seems no reason to doubt that he was then actually in Rome, and taking share in all the religious exercises of the time.

Thus, then, after his great sorrow of youth, after the active years of life—in which occupation of many kinds, strife and diplomacy, and all that is most serious and most exciting in the earlier half of existence, had been increasing his experiences and maturing his mind—the poet arrived at some unknown crisis in his consciousness that drove him back out of the ordinary public affairs, which other men could do as well as he, into his true vocation. What that crisis was, or if it was any external crisis at all, or only a secret gathering of all his forces to the solution of those great questions which affect humanity in all ages, we cannot tell. But it is certainly with this high meaning that the poem begins. We give the opening sentences, made familiar by continual quotation, from Dr Carlyle's literal translation—

"In the middle of the journey of our life I found myself in a dark wood, for the straight way was lost. Ah, how hard a thing it is to tell what a wild and rough and stubborn wood this was, which in my thought renews the fear! so bitter is it, that scarcely more is death."

This is the key-note of the wondrous tale. The beginning is confused, and full of darkness and terror. He was so full of sleep at the time when he lost his way

that he cannot tell how it happened; but when he comes to himself the night has passed, and he finds himself at the foot of a hill which closes in the valley, and sees the sun appearing behind its shoulders, clothing it with light, "the planet that leads men straight by every road." Cheered by this after the terrors of the night, and taking courage, he begins to attempt the slope, but is stopped by the sudden appearance of a leopard, though its beautiful coat, spotted with many colours, combines with the freshness of the morning to exhilarate rather than alarm him. However, beautiful as it is, it bars the way, which is further closed to him by the more alarming appearance of a lion fiercely advancing, furious with hunger, and a gaunt she-wolf, "full of cravings in her leanness." This combination of wild creatures drives him back in renewed terror. These three animals are an allegory, and represent, it is believed, Pleasure in the form of the leopard, his personal temptations—Ambition, the lion—and Avarice or Greed, the wolf,—another, but more than usually realistic, representation of the world, the flesh, and the devil; with, however, this special qualification, that whereas the first symbol of the leopard bears its usual meaning, as the type of those fleshly temptations to which the poet found himself liable, the lion embodied no abstract vice, but the rising tumult of actual strife around, the Guelf and Ghibelline contentions which made Florence no abiding-place for any ideal life, and the continual strife of those kings and emperors in whose protection no state could trust; while the wolf represented the hungry greed of Rome, cutting off all chance of succour on that side. Amid all these discouragements and impediments, public and personal, the poet lost his way, and

found the problems of life and society unintelligible and inexplicable. Neither on one side nor on the other could he find a way of escape. But in this strait, succour came to him from higher powers.

"While in these lower shades I roamed, I saw
Suddenly set before my vision, one
Hoarse with long silence; whom at once, with awe
In that great desert where I stood alone,
Seeing, 'Have mercy upon me!' I said,
'If shade thou art, or name of man you own.'
He answered, 'Man I was, though 'mong the dead
Called man no more; Lombards my parents were,
Both for their town in ancient Mantua bred.
Sub Julio I was born, though late the year,
And under good Augustus lived of old
In Rome, when lying gods were worshipped there.
I was a poet, and the story told
Of that just son of old Anchises brought
Hither, when of proud Troy the flames were cold.
But thou, what has in thee such evil wrought?
Why lingerest thou, that this delightsome mount,
The cause and head of joy, thou climbest not?'
'Art thou that Virgil? Art thou then that fount
Which spreads abroad so fair a stream of speech?'
I cried, abashed and with a shamefaced front.
'Oh, light and sun of poets! may I reach
Thy grace by the long study and love true
Which made me seek all that thy muse could teach.'"

That Virgil should be chosen for Dante's guide through the gloomy Hades of which he had so long been an inmate, is doubly appropriate from the "long study and love" with which the younger poet had dwelt upon the works of the elder, and from the fact that Virgil, too, had described a similar pilgrimage. But at first no such undertaking occurs to Dante's mind, and

he begs only to be delivered from "this beast," the wolf, of which he stands most in fear. Virgil tells him that the fate of this fierce antagonist is not in their hands, though it may perhaps be quelled by a mysteriously indicated champion, whose land lies "between Feltro and Feltro," and whom some suppose to have been Can' della Scala of Verona. We may as well say at once that we will not attempt to bring the whole range of Tuscan history into this little book by any endeavour to make these allusions clear. Dante has been systematically overlaid with masses of antiquarian lore, not of much interest to any but students who have the time to pursue such inquiries; and the reader who wishes to enter profoundly into all the allusions of local and historical meaning, will find no difficulty in choosing his guide from among a crowd of commentators. But whereas all humankind are interested in the way in which a man of great genius justifies the ways of God to men, and recounts the manner of his own escape from the confusing grasp of problems unsolvable by ordinary experience, and with which we have still to contend at the present time — and in those piteous or tender or terrible examples which illustrate the argument,—it is only a limited number who are interested in Can' della Scala, or Uguccione della Faggiola, or the other contemporary princes and potentates, whose fights and emulations, and bloodsheddings and magnificences, fill up the story of the time.

We resume after this necessary digression. Having given this indication of a deliverer with the mysterious vagueness of prophecy, Virgil announces to Dante that as for himself he must find another way of extrication

from his difficulty; and this can only be by following his guide through the eternal land, where he shall see the ancient spirits in pain, and after shall behold those who are contented in the fire, because they hope for final blessedness. If after this he would ascend still further, another spirit more worthy will be his guide; for to Virgil it is not permitted to enter into the city of the great King. Dante accepts the proposal gladly, and they go on together, although by this time "the day was departing, and the brown air taking the animals that are on earth from their toils." When, however, they have begun their journey, an impulse of fear seizes the poet, and, in the second canto, he asks his guide the reason why this wonderful privilege is granted to him. That Æneas, the father of the Roman race, should be permitted to visit the world of spirits, might be becoming and necessary; and so with St Paul, the chosen vessel, whose office and functions made him worthy of such a grace; but what had Dante done to make this privilege possible? He trembles and hesitates on the threshold of the world of shadows with this natural pang of alarm and wonder. His questions and doubts draw from Virgil the following explanation of his own mission to the wanderer:—

"I dwelt 'mong those who in suspense have rest,
When came a lovely lady from afar,
So fair, I humbly waited her behest.
Shone her sweet eyes more bright than any star,
And she began with gentle voice and soft,
Angelical as tones of seraphs are:
'Oh courteous Mantuan soul! whose glory, oft
Renowned, still lasts on earth, and to the end
Shall last while nature holds her progress soft,

A man who is my friend, but not the friend
Of Fortune: in a desert place is so
Hindered and troubled, that his terrors tend
To lose him the true path. Already woe,
I fear, has reached him, since perchance too late
I rose to help, from what in heaven we know.
But come thou now, and with thy words ornate,
And all thou know'st for his deliverance meet,
Console my grief and save him from his fate.
For I am Beatrice who thus entreat
Thy help; I would return from whence I came.
Love moved and makes me speak. When at the feet
Of my dear Lord I am, then shall thy name
Be lauded oft and spoke before His throne.'
Here was she silent, and my answer came:
'Oh Lady of great grace! by whom alone[1]
The human race excels all that may be
Contained within the earth's encircling zone,
So grateful thy commandment is to me,
That were it done, I still should think it slow;
Nor is there need thy wish more clear should be.
But first, I pray, let me the reason know
Why nought impedes you thus far to descend
From the great sphere, where back you fain would go?'
'If you would briefly know the cause and end,'
She said, 'then shall you soon be satisfied
Why nought I fear when here my steps I bend.
These things are to be feared which, being tried,
Bring real evil; but where never trace
Of harm can be, there can no fear abide.
I am so made and fashioned by God's grace,
That from your misery no stain is given,
Nor sparks of burning reach me from this place.
There is a gentle lady in high heaven,

[1] This refers to the allegorical character of Beatrice as the representation of heavenly wisdom.

Who has such pity of the impediment
I send thee to, that power to her is given
To soften judgment. Thus she called and sent
Lucia, saying, "Lo! thy faithful one
Hath need of thee; let help to him be lent."
Lucia, foe of every cruelty done,
Arose and came to where I then abode,
By Rachel seated there, of old renown.
She said: "Oh Beatrice, true praise of God!
He who so loves thee, heed'st thou not his need?
For thee he issued from the vulgar crowd.
Hear'st thou not now what sad complaints proceed
From him, nor how with death he combats there,
By yonder stream whose waves no ocean feed?"
On earth was never one so quick to fare
Forth for their profit, or to flee from pain,
As I when words like these came on the air.
Then hither to this lower world I came,
Trusting in that clear, candid speech of thine,
Which honours those who know thee and thy fame.
While thus she spoke, to me her radiant eyne
She turned all bright with tears, which seeing, I
Hasted my way to make her errand mine."

"How can you fear," cries Virgil, in conclusion, "when three such blessed ladies think of you in the high courts of heaven?" And Dante acknowledges the justice of the appeal. "As the flowers," he says, "bent down and closed by the night's frost, as soon as the sun shines spring upright on their stems," so his heart warmed, and his courage returned to him. "Oh, full of pity she who thus succoured me, and courteous thou who so obeyed her call!" And he goes on with his leader, like "a man fired," full of confidence and strength. The third canto brings us to the gate of

Hades, the lower world, in which so much misery and pain are to be seen. The inscription over the door has also been the subject of perpetual quotation: "By me is entered the city of pain; by me men pass into eternal suffering; by me they go among the lost souls. Let him leave hope behind who enters here." And as soon as the steps of the two poets have crossed the threshold, the change from the upper world becomes at once apparent. At the very gate they find themselves amid a rabble of nameless souls, too mean for anything but the antechamber, even of the infernal regions.

"Here sighs and groans and bitter plaints arose,
Resounding through the still and starless air,
So that at first I wept those heavy woes.
Horrible speech and diverse tongues were there;
Accents of sorrow, bursts of angry sound,
Hoarse and high voices, hands struck in despair,
Such tumult made, such woful outcry found,
In that dim air unmoved by mortal change,
As when the whirlwind drives the dust-storm round.
And I, whose head was bound with errors strange,
Said, 'Master, tell me what is this I hear,
And whence the woes that thus so wildly range?'
And he to me: 'This form of misery drear
Holds the sad souls of those whose life was spent
With neither shame nor fame; now mingled here
With that dim choir of caitiff angels bent
Not to be rebels, nor upon God's side
To stand, but to themselves their thoughts were lent.
Lest something of her beauty they should hide,
Heaven casts them forth; nor would deep Hell receive
Those souls in which even Vice could take no pride.'
And I: 'Master, what are the pangs that grieve
And weigh so sore, that thus they weep and moan?'
He answered, 'Briefly may you this perceive:

All hopes of death are from them past and gone;
And their blind life appears so poor and base,
Envious, they find all fates excel their own.
The world is sick of them and their disgrace;
Mercy and justice alike scorn their name.
Speak not of them, but look, and pass the place.'"

Nothing can be more characteristic of Dante than this lofty scorn of the nameless crew which he sees rushing aimlessly after a whirling banner, a vast train, more of them than he could have supposed death to have yet undone, naked, and stung by wasps and hornets. Among them, as they pass, he perceives him who, "from cowardice, made the great refusal," supposedly Pope Celestine, who resigned the Papal crown.[1] Passing from this wretched mob, they come to the banks of the river on which Charon plies his eternal boat, and there see a crowd of souls waiting to be taken across. The spirits are very humble, and the ferryman imperious. "Woe to you, depraved spirits!" he cries; "hope not again to see the sun. I come to lead you into eternal darkness." The unhappy sinners on the brink, weary and naked, change colour and gnash their teeth at this address, but crowd into the boat, weeping and blaspheming, while Charon beats with his oar any lingering soul. Throughout the "Inferno" the reader will find all the varieties of bodily pain in full force, notwithstanding the fact that the sufferers are but "vain shadows," impalpable to mortal touch. Charon, who refuses at first to accept the unaccustomed load of a living man, is obliged to submit by Virgil, and the two spectators cross with him to the other shore.

[1] Also said, with much plausibility, to refer to Matt. xix. 22.

LIMBO AND THE UPPER HELL.

It is only in the fourth canto of the poem that we reach Hell itself, the abode of the lost. And even here the great gradations of pain which we are about to survey are still distant; the beginning has nothing but a mild poetic gloom, an infinite soft sadness, which subdues and melts the heart of the spectator. When Acheron is crossed, the two poets find themselves on the borders of still another introductory circle, well known to Virgil, in which the noble heathen is at home.

"Here, on the edge I found me of the vale,
Of that most dread abyss which everywhere
Was filled with moanings of an infinite wail.
So deep and dark and cloudy was the air,
That, fixing on the gloomy depths my gaze,
Nought could I see of all the evil there.
'Now pass we down into this blind world's maze'—
Thus spoke the poet, with an aspect pale;
'I shall go first, thou second.' With amaze
I said, perceiving thus his colour fail,
'How go, if thou, sole comfort, art afraid?'
And he: 'These wretched folk in pain and bale
Such paleness of great pity bring, as made
Upon thy eyes deceived the effect of fear.
But press we on, and be no burden laid
Upon thee by the length of way.' So here,
In the first round that circles the abyss,
He made me enter. On the listening ear
No wail of weeping round us moaned in this
Dark zone; but a great sighing breathed about,
And trembled in the eternal air: so 'tis
That sorrow without torment moves the rout,
Many and great of women, babes, and men.

Then my good Master said, 'Stay'st thou without
Question, who are these spirits? To thy ken
I would disclose them ere we further pass.
These have not sinned—perchance had merit when
They lived: but that sufficed not; never was
That baptism theirs, of thy great faith the door;
For before Christ their lives were ended, as
Mine too, who am of them; not just before
God, was our worship: for such fault, and not
For other evil lost, we bear no more
Than that, thus hopeless, longing is our lot
For what we ne'er attain.' Great sorrow swelled
My heart; for many a noble soul, I wot,
In that dim Hades in suspense is held."

So strong is this compunction on the part of Dante, that he anxiously inquires whether any one has ever been delivered out of this guiltless Limbo, and is informed that "a powerful one, crowned with the sign of victory," did come soon after Virgil entered that place, and delivered our first parents, Noah, Moses, Abraham, and many others. Talking of this, they move onward through a region full, as Dante can perceive, of honourable people, where he sees four great shadows advancing to meet them, who hail his companion with welcome as one returning home, greeting him as "the most honoured poet." This band, led by Homer, "Lord of Highest Song," includes Horace, Ovid, and Lucan, all of whom salute Dante with friendly signs, and receive him among them, so that he finds himself the sixth of this splendid company. The conversation that passed between them was such that even the silent recollection of it is beautiful; but the poet does not pause to inform us what it was. His great brethren, however, lead him to

their dwelling in a noble castle, seven times circled by a high wall, and surrounded by a beautiful streamlet, which they cross as if it were dry land. Within, in the centre of the towers, is a beautiful meadow of fresh verdure, and here are many people with quiet eyes, soft and slow voices, and a noble, dignified aspect. Standing apart, he sees Electra, with Hector and Æneas, Camilla, Penthesilea, the Latin king and his daughter Lavinia, the Brutus who drove out Tarquin, and many other great personages of antiquity, walking about the emerald turf; and there sits Aristotle, "master of those who know," and Socrates and Plato, with all their great followers,—a large and noble company. Among them, yet separate, sitting alone and apart, is the sole modern in this land of gentle sadness, the Soldan Saladin, a touching instance of poetic honour to the worthy. The noble castle, the green meadow, the stream and walls which divide them from all the ills of Hell, come with a fine surprise upon the reader, after dark Acheron, and that vestibule and antechamber of misery where the contemptible host which has done neither good nor evil holds continual wail. A classic silence is over this halcyon spot. Theirs is only the noble sorrow of desiring what is best, without hope of ever attaining it. They do not break forth in audible speech before us, as in the more miserable circles beyond, where every feeling is sharpened by pain. Nothing more harsh than a pensive dimness envelops this one eternal "suspense," in which no torment is.

The travellers, however, cannot linger here. And soon Virgil leads Dante out of the noble company, out of the quiet, into the air which is tremulous with pain, and where no light is. Here the second circle opens upon

us—the real beginning of the Hell of torment; and we see Minos, the infernal judge, one of the most horrible and grotesque figures within its dark enclosure. He "stands horribly and grins" at his victims, and delivers their sentences by wrapping his tail round him as many times as they must descend circles to reach their places of punishment. This is one of the few places in which the grotesque fancy of his time invades the nobler strain of the poet's imagination. It is finely atoned for, however, as we proceed, since the same canto in which is this horrible Minos, contains one of the most beautiful episodes in the whole poem—the story of Francesca and Paolo—better known, perhaps, than any other detached scene. This circle is the place of punishment of those who have sinned by love, and contains Helen, Dido, Semiramis, Cleopatra, Paris, Achilles, and many others. There is storm in the air, and darkness, and wild winds rush about from one direction to another, driving before them like birds the weeping spirits. Amid these are two clinging close together, who attract the special attention of the wayfarer.

"Then I began: 'O poet! gladly I
Would talk with yonder pair who side by side
So light upon the wind together fly.'
And he to me: 'Attend, and when they glide
Nearer to where we stand, then pray them thou,
By that love which thus links them, here to guide
Their steps.' Soon as the wind towards us blew,
I raised my voice: 'O breathless spirits! come
And speak to us, if nothing hinder you.'
As doves by strong desire called to their home,
With open wings and strong, to that sweet nest,
Borne by their wishes, straight and sudden come,
Forth from the group which Dido's name confest,

They came to us on the malignant air—
So strong this tender call had touched their breast.
'O gracious living creature, mild and fair!
Who through this gloom comes on a visit kind
To us, who from the world such blood-stains bear,
Were we the friends of Him who rules mankind,
For peace to thee then should we surely pray,
Since our sad fate to pity moves thy mind.
What it may please thee now to hear or say.
At thy goodwill we listen will, or speak,
While the still wind permits our steps to stay.
Where Po and all his tributaries seek
Rest in the ocean, held my house command;
There was I born where the sea-waters break.
Love, still to gentle hearts so near at hand,
Seized him for that fair form that once was mine,
Reft from me by an unforgotten brand.
Love, which permits not that the loved decline
To love, made him to me so close and dear,
That, as thou seest, his lot is still with mine.
Love led us forth together to one bier;
The murderer's hell waits him our lives who shed.'
These were the words borne to my listening ear.
When I had heard these wounded souls, my head
I drooped, and mournful let the moments pass,
Until, 'What think ye now?' the poet said;
And I, responding, thus began: 'Alas!
How many gentle thoughts, what wishes sweet,
Have brought their steps unto this mournful pass!'
Then turned I back towards them to repeat
My suit: 'Francesca, for thy woe mine eyes
Salt tears, and sad, have shed; now I entreat,
Tell me how, at that moment of sweet sighs,
And when, the love, at last conceded, came,
And how the doubtful wishes might arise?'
And she to me: 'There is no greater pain
Than to go back upon our happy days,
In time of grief; your leader knows the strain.

But if to understand the earliest rays
Of this our love you are so strongly bent,
Then will I do as one who weeps and says.
One day we read together, with intent
Of pleasure, and without one evil thought,
Of Lancelot, and how his soul was rent
By love. We were alone; the reading wrought
So that our eyes we oft cast down, the while
Blushing. But one sole point the victory brought;
When we had read how the beloved smile
Was kissed by such a lover, then this youth,
Who ne'er from me can part by any wile,
Turned round and kissed me trembling on the mouth.
The book was Galeotto, and so he
Was named who wrote, and led to harm: in truth
That day we read no more.' While one to me
Thus spake, the other wept so sore, that, led
By pity, I became as one that dies,
And prone I fell, as falls a body dead."

We now go on to the third circle, in which we find the gluttons, whose love of luxury is punished by the misery of eternal discomfort, and who, beaten down under a perpetual rain, "eternal, accursed, cold, and heavy," mixed with great hailstones, sleet, and snow, lie prostrate on the muddy ground. Cerberus, with sharp claws and crimson eyes, stands over them, tearing and rending the unhappy ones, and barking so that it were well to be deaf. As the travellers pass through under the heavy rain, now and then in the darkness placing their feet upon those "things of vanity that appear persons," one of them sits up and calls pitifully upon the poet. It is a dainty liver and hanger-on of society, called by the nickname of Ciacco, the pig—a miserable Florentine and parasite of Dante's party, from whom, wretched as he

is, the poet makes inquiry what is to be the fate of Florence, and who prophesies the downfall of the faction. Moved with pity for this wretched sinner, whom he has known in his lifetime, Dante asks Virgil if the torments of the lost will be greater or less after they recover their bodies at the Resurrection, and is told that then only will be the perfection of their pain.

At the entrance to the fourth circle they find Pluto, stammering forth some incomprehensible gibberish, whom Virgil silences by a disdainful word as they pass. Here it is the avaricious and the prodigal who are punished together. They are divided into two parties, rolling with all their force, and pushing with their breasts, great stones towards each other, which meet and dash together: then turning, to be violently forced into concussion again; the one party cry, "Why holdest thou?" the other, "Why castest thou away?" Dante, having his heart "almost broken" by this wild tumult and conflict, questions his leader. "Are all those priests," he says, "to our left, those who have the tonsure?" to which the answer is given, that not only are they clergy, but popes and cardinals are among those tonsured ones, "who have no hairy covering on the head." Dante thinks that he is sure to recognise some one in the crowd; but Virgil assures him, scornfully, that their ignoble life has so besotted them in their mutual wasting of the gifts of fortune, that now they know no one. "What is fortune, then," asks the poet, "who has the wealth of the world in her hands?" And Virgil, in an eloquent speech, refutes the blame cast upon this visionary power, whom men charge with the blame of their own sins. "But she is among the blessed, and does not hear them."

Thus talking, they go round half the circle, and come to the banks of a dark water, "darker than perse," the deepest purple, which runs into the lake called Styx. Under this water Dante perceives a multitude of muddy and indistinguishable figures, striking and tearing each other. These are the souls of those whom anger and furious temper swayed on earth. Fixed in that glutinous mud, Virgil tells him, they are ever saying, with inarticulate sounds that gurgle in their throats, and raise bubbles in the gloomy stream, "Sad were we in the sweet air brightened by the sun, carrying bitter vapours within us, and sad are we in this muddy darkness." Descending along the course of the melancholy water, with their eyes fixed upon the moving crowd within it, they come to the foot of a tower on the banks of the dismal lake. Here, according to Boccaccio's story, already referred to, the beginning made by Dante before his banishment ends; and the next canto begins with words which give a certain support to this theory. "To resume," says the poet. While they wait, flame-signals are made from the tower, which are answered from a distance as far as the eye can reach; and quick as an arrow over the lake comes a little boat, conducted by a fierce ferryman, the furious Phlegyas, doubly angry to find that the passengers he has to carry are of such an unusual kind. This dismal lake of Styx is in itself the fifth circle, and is inhabited by the arrogant and quarrelsome, of whom the following example makes himself apparent as they cross:—

"Soon as my guide and I were in the boat,
More deep dipped in the stream than e'er before,
The ancient prow shot o'er the gloomy moat.

In front of me rose one bedabbled o'er,
A mass of filth, while o'er the wave we sped:
'Who art thou here, arrived before thy hour?'
'I come but stay not here,' to him I said;
'But who art thou, of such an aspect vile?'
'Thou seest I am one who weeps,' replied
The voice; and I to him, 'With tears and toil,
Spirit accursed, in thy filth remain;
I know thee, though by foulness hid awhile.'
Then with both hands he clutched the boat amain;
My Master loosed his grasp and cast us free,
Saying, 'Hence, with other wretches of thy strain!'
Then with embracing arms he turned to me,
And kissed my face, and said, 'Indignant soul,
Happy the mother who gave birth to thee!
Proud upon earth was he who bears this dole:
No gentle deeds lend to his memory grace;
And thus his furious shade has dwelling foul.
Many there be who fill the highest place,
Kings upon earth, who here like swine shall bide,
Leaving but scorn and horror in their trace.'
And I: 'Master, within this dismal tide
Fain would I see him deeply dipped before
We issue forth upon the other side.'
And he to me: 'Ere we have touched the shore,
Thou shalt be satisfied; nought should oppose
To such just wish an answer o'er and o'er.'
A little after such a tumult rose
Amid those filthy folk, as still to praise
And magnify our God my thoughts dispose,
'To Filippo Argenti!' loud they raise
The cry; and that vile spirit Florentine
Tore himself with his teeth in furious craze.
Thus leave we him with no more words of mine."

Up to this time Dante has been very pitiful of the sufferings he has encountered; and, save in two or three cases, he remains so. Nor are the special sins of arrogance

and wrath so alien to his own nature as to justify this sudden indignation, which is more natural when the sinners are found among the fraudulent and traitors. There seems reason to suppose, however, that in Filippo Argenti he saw a bitter personal enemy, and one whose arrogance had been specially offensive to all good Florentines. If Dante's last sight of this wretch had been in the narrow medieval street through which he rode on the horse that he had shod with silver, riding down and crushing against the walls the helpless foot-passengers, our wonder at his hardness of heart to "one who weeps" may be a little modified. Ere this adventure has terminated, however, the poets come in sight of the city of Dis, rising red out of the valley, its towers and mosques burning with a concentrated redness as of flame. The boatman steers them through the gloomy ditches that surround it, till they are near the gate. And then an alarming interruption comes in their way. The gates of the city are closed against them; and from the towers above, more than a thousand spirits, who are of those who were "rained down from heaven"—the rebellious angels—loudly refuse admission, though at length they consent to parley with Virgil alone, whose separation from him, even for a few steps, fills Dante with dismay. The parley, however, is unsuccessful, the dark angels, who had come to the gates to confer with Virgil, shutting them violently in his face. The Master comes back to his trembling companion with a changed countenance, muttering to himself; but presently bids Dante take courage, announcing the approach of one who will certainly open to them the closed doors. In this suspense the ninth canto begins. Even Virgil has for a moment an aspect

of doubt. "We must gain the mastery," he says; "such help was offered to us—oh, how long it seems till the other comes!" This prompts the question from Dante, made, trembling, to cover his own terrors, whether any one ever descends here from the circle to which Virgil belongs. While Virgil answers, that though it is rare, he has himself been here before, a horrible sight appears on the burning tower of the city, where all at once the three Furies come out, with shrieks and vengeful cries. "Let Medusa come, that we may change him into stone," they shriek out. "Turn, turn, and keep thy eyes shut!" cries Virgil; and not content with this exhortation, he himself turns his companion round and covers his eyes with his own hands. "Oh ye of sound understandings, mark the meaning that lies beneath these words!" says Dante, in passing; but the reader will probably be more eager to hear the fine interruption which breaks this spell of terror, than to guess at the hidden doctrine of which even professional commentators make wild work. The Furies are still on the high tower, which seems to hang over the burning city as the great tower of the Vacca hangs over Florence; and the anxious guide below covers the eyes of his charge to save him from the petrifying glance of the Gorgon, when the situation changes in a moment—

"Now o'er the turbid waters came a sound,
A note of wild alarm that filled the air,
A tremor o'er both banks that crept around:
Not otherwise the wind, with sudden blare,
Impetuous 'mid the burnings of the storm
Darts through the wood, rending and making bare,
The broken boughs upon its tumult borne,
And, proud in dust and darkness marching on,
Chases the shepherds and the sheep forlorn.

My eyes he freed, and 'Look,' he said, 'upon
Yon ancient foam where most it heaves and swells,
And where most dense the acrid smoke has grown.'
Like frogs quick scattering through the marsh where dwells
Their tribe, at noiseless gliding of a snake,
Till all in the moist earth have found them cells,
So saw I thousands of lost spirits take
Quick flight, as one approached who o'er the pass
Of Styx his way dry-shod was seen to make.
Raising his left hand with quick movement, as
From off his face the stagnant air to clear,
And weary of that paltry need he was,
Soon I perceived that heaven-commissioned here
He came, and to my Master turned again,
Whose sign bade silence and a reverent fear.
Ah me! how great he seemed in his disdain!
Quick to the gate he passed, and with his wand
Opened; for bar was none that could retain.
'O spirits fallen from heaven, accursed band!'
Upon the awful threshold thus he spake,
'Why insolent strive ye 'gainst that command,
Resist that will, which at a word can wake
New torments, and renew deservèd dole—
That will which from its end no power can shake?'
. . . . . .
Then turned he from that foul and dismal strand,
Nor noticed us, but quickly passed as one
With many a nobler thought and care on hand."

After this everything is clear. They enter at the open gates unopposed. Hell with all its fury has no power against the messenger of God.

In the preliminary circles thus traversed by the poets, the guilt which is punished is evidently, in his idea at all events, the least damnable of human transgressions. The guilty love which still permits Francesca and Paolo to remain together, and the misuse of worldly goods, gold,

good-living, and rank, are bad enough to fill up to all appearance the cup of suffering for the guilty; but they are very different from the violence, fraud, and perfidy which occupy the lower levels. It is a proof of his impartiality and right-mindedness that he gives even these less guilty sinners no gleam of personal consolation, no sense that they are less in evil or less in punishment. There is not any mistake of this kind possible throughout that dark territory; but the spectator sees the difference, and feels that he is still within the boundaries of legitimate pity.

THE CITY OF DIS.

The second dark water — the gloomy lake of Styx, with the dismal crew that lurks in it—has been crossed, and the gates of the red city have been opened by a celestial hand. It is a new division of the world of punishment which is thus revealed to us. Named from the gloomy king of the lower world, it is the land of the violent in which we now find ourselves. Those who have done violence to God, to themselves, or to others, who have strained nature to their will and forced her works, are now to unfold to us their eternal pain; and everything has prepared us for the further revelation—the glow of the red towers, the fury of its inhabitants, the visible agency of heaven to constrain the rebels. When the two poets enter the city all its wild defenders are dispersed; fallen angels and Furies have gone away or retired into the burning towers; and the place itself turns out to be no city, in the ordinary sense of the word, but a vast enclosure full of tombs — the burying-ground in which heretics, especially those who do not believe in

the immortality of the soul, have their appropriate punishment, buried for ever, as they believed—yet proved, by the very fashion of their burial, bitterly wrong in their belief. The sepulchres are open and full of flames; and as the two poets pass discoursing, and Dante has expressed his desire to know who lies there, they are suddenly accosted out of one of the tombs by a notable sufferer:—

"'O Tuscan! thus with open mortal speech,
That by the burning city living goes,
Please you to pause a while when here you reach.
To me the language of your utterance shows
That from that noble land your birth you have,
To which, perchance, I brought too many woes.'
Suddenly came this voice that issued, grave
From out a tomb; at which I faltering drew
Close to my guide, whose presence courage gave.
He said to me: 'Turn; know you what you do?
'Tis Farinata who, thus raised upright,
From brow to girdle, shows himself to you.'
I had already fixed on him my sight;
Proudly his brow and breast upward he swayed,
As one who held this hell in high despite.
With eager hand, and quick, my leader made
Between him and the sepulchre a way,
And thrust me there. 'Thy time is brief,' he said.
When to the tomb's foot I had made my way,
He looked at me; then, with a half disdain,
Questioned me thus: 'Thy fathers, who were they?'
To do his will eager I was, and fain,
And all recounted to him, hiding nought.
A little rose his eyebrows proud; again
He spoke: 'Fiercely adverse were they in thought
And deed to me, my party, and my race;
So were they twice to flight and exile brought.'
'If they were exiled, driven from place to place,'

Quickly I said, 'yet home they found their way;
Your faction never learned that happy grace.'
Then rose there, suddenly, from where it lay
Unseen, another shade, the face alone
O'er the tomb's edge raised, as one kneeling may,
And round me looked, gazing as if for one
Who might perchance be following after me;
When it was clearly seen that there was none:
Weeping—'If these blind prisons thus you see,'
He said, 'and thread by loftiness of mind,
Where is my son? why is he not with thee?'
I said: 'Not by myself my way I find;
And unto him who leads and makes it plain,
Thy Guido's soul perchance was ne'er inclined.'
Thus by his words, and manner of his pain,
Guided I was to answer full and right,
So clear I read his meaning and his name.
'How saidst thou?—*was?* Ah, lives he then no more?
Strikes his dear eyes no more the blessed light?'
When he perceived me pause, and I forbore
Unto this question any quick reply,
Prostrate he dropped, and thence appeared no more.
But that heroic shade, whose prison I
Had first approached, and by whom still remained,
Unchanged in aspect and in gesture high,
Moved not, but the first argument maintained.
'If,' said he, 'they have badly learned that art,
By that, more than this bed, my soul is pained.
But ere the queen who rules this gloomy part
Shall fifty times uplift her gleaming face,
That lesson, hard to learn, shall crush thy heart.
If in the sweet world thou wouldst e'er find grace,
Tell me why thus 'gainst all who bear my name
The people rage, and hard laws curse and chase.'
I answered him: 'The bitter strife and shame
That dyed the flowing Arbia crimson-red,
Has in our temple raised such height of blame.'

Sighing, he said, and shook his mournful head,
'In these things was not I alone, nor could,
Without grave reason, be by others led.
But I stood sole, when all, consenting, would
Have swept off Florence from the earth: alone
And openly in her defence I stood.'"

Dante asks Farinata how it is that he can predict the future, but does not know the present; and is answered that the sufferers in Hell are permitted to see things far off, like those of imperfect vision, and that their punishment will be increased by the fact that when the future is closed at the day of judgment all knowledge will be taken from them. He then requests that the other shadow, Cavalcanti, the father of his friend Guido, already referred to, may be informed that his son is not dead—the cruelty of his own silence in this particular having filled him with compunction: and follows his Master, who calls him, musing deeply upon the prophecy of evil to himself which he has just heard. Virgil bids him keep this in mind until he sees the lady in heaven, who will make all clear to him. Then leaving the path between the wall and the tombs, they strike towards the centre, where the valley descends into the lower rings of the abyss. When they reach the opening, which is a rocky precipice, they are driven back by the terrible stench which breathes upward, and from which they take refuge under the shade of a great monument inscribed as the eternal prison of "Pope Anastasius, whom Photinus led from the right way." Here Virgil gives his companion a preliminary exposition of what he is about to see. As Lust reigned in the early circles, Malice is the inspiring principle now; and in the next round which follows,

and which is divided into three portions, are punished the violent: those who have done violence to themselves, their neighbours, or to God; murderers, unnatural sinners, robbers, and blasphemers. Underneath that, darker and lower still, comes the home of fraud: the hypocrites, barterers or fraudulent dealers, simonists, and panders; and, last of all, the traitors, culminating in Lucifer himself — the last and deepest centre of the abyss. In the infernal regions there is but little ethical discussion. Dante leaves that exercise for loftier spheres, the things he sees being too vivid and wonderful to require any aid of interpretation; and Virgil's lecture is almost a solitary break upon the force and rapidity of the narrative, which is too full of things and human creatures to leave leisure for disquisition. Having by this pause accustomed themselves to the stench, they plunge below. Throughout the journey Virgil keeps reminding his companion of the progress of time, as though in some way, notwithstanding the gloomy darkness about them, they had a dim consciousness how the blessed stars, emblems of all good, were waning or rising. "The Pisces are on the horizon," he now says, by way of hastening the steps of Dante, indicating the dawn of another morning, after the wonderful journey of the night.

They descend accordingly by a rocky and broken cliff. The rock is so steep and terrible, "that every eye would shrink from it;" and at the top lies wallowing the Minotaur, incomprehensible monster. All the mythological beasts of evil omen and monstrous form are to be found in this dismal country, bearing some dim analogy or medieval conceit of resemblance to the sinners with whose sad story they are mingled. A sharp speech on

the part of Virgil, however, drives the monster out of the way, and Dante clambers down the terrible rock. At the foot runs a river of blood, in which bloodshedders are submerged; and on the banks of this great ditch they find a band of Centaurs, whose business it is to keep the sufferers in the stream. These guardians approach the travellers threateningly, but are calmed by Virgil's explanation. "She came from singing Alleluiah, who gave me this office," he says; and Chiron himself, the leader of the band, perceives that Dante is not dead. Accordingly he gives them, at the request of the elder poet, a guide in the person of Nessus, to lead them to the ford. The Centaurs are the only officials (so to speak) employed in the "Inferno" who retain a certain gentleness and humanity in their hideous work. There is a calmness and languor about them which afford a moment's relief in the surrounding gloom. Nessus goes with the poets, a perfectly courteous and friendly guide, and tells them that here tyrants and bloody oppressors are overwhelmed in the red flood. The great Alexander is there; and there, more exciting to the passenger, the cruel Azzolino and Obizzo of Este—tyrants more close at hand and easy to recognise than greater but more distant potentates. The stream shallows as they go, and the sufferers gradually become visible, some with their heads above the tide, which gradually recedes, showing the rest of their persons, till the ford is reached, where it only covers the feet. From this point Dante requires no instructor, but himself recognises many who lie about the boiling stream, which they cross at last by the Centaur's help. Nessus then leaves them, making his way back to his charge and a new scene begins.

"Not yet had Nessus gained the bank when we
Upon the borders of a wood came down,
In which no trace of pathway could we see.
And no green leaves were there, but foliage brown;
No branches straight, but gnarled and twisted all;
No fruit, but poisoned thorns the branches crown.
. . . . . .
On every side I heard a sound of wail,
But none could see from whom these plaints might rise;
At which I paused with wildered looks, and pale.
I think he thought that in my thoughts unwise
The fancy dwelt that those sad voices rose
From lurking creatures hidden from our eyes.
Then said the Master: 'If thou pluck of those
Brown branches but one twig, full soon it will
The verity to curious thoughts disclose.'
Then forth I put my hand, unthinking ill,
And from a great wild thorn-tree plucked a bough.
'Why tear'st thou me?' the trunk wailed forth, while still
Drops of brown blood oozed out—'Why rendest thou
My leaves? Dwells there no pity in thy heart?
Men were we, though but thicket bushes now.
Surely more pitiful should be thy part
If serpents' souls we were, instead of men.'
And as from firewood green whence flames may start
From one end, while the other's groaning stem
Water gives forth, and hisses on the wind,
So from the wound came words and tears with them.
Then quick I dropped the twig of this sad kind,
And all aghast stood as a man that fears.
'If otherwise faith could have reached his mind,
O wounded soul! of that which but appears
In my own verse,' my gentle guide replied,
'Never had hand of his called forth these tears.
Truth so incredible to me supplied
Hardness; though heavy to myself the pain.
But tell him who thou art, that so thy pride
Of mortal fame he may perchance again
On earth renew, and make thee some amends.'"

The wounded tree turns out to be Pietro delle Vigne, the secretary of the Emperor Frederick II., driven to suicide, as he explains, by envy and slander, but otherwise above reproach. The unhappy spirit, consoled by the assurance that his self-vindication shall be made known in the world, answers to Dante's question, that though he and his fellow-sinners will be allowed to go for their bodies at the Resurrection like all the rest, they shall not therefore be again clothed with them, "for it is not just that a man should have again that which he has taken from himself." Their final doom will be, that each body shall be suspended on the tree in which its spirit has found shelter.

This conversation, however, is violently interrupted by the rushing through the wood of two naked spirits, pursued by a pack of black hounds, who break the branches on every side in their mad passage through the thicket. One of them conceals himself behind a bush, and there is found and torn to pieces, the unwilling thorn which has been his screen suffering also in the conflict. The two travellers, who have watched this episode, draw near while the bush moans out its complaint—"Oh Jacopo da Sant' Andrea!" it cries, "what hast thou gained by making me suffer?" And when further questioned, the sufferer begs that the twigs torn off may be gathered and placed at its feet; and declares itself a citizen of the city which changed its first patron for the Baptist, adding, "I made myself a gibbet in my own house." No name, however, is given to this unhappy Florentine. Those whose wild rush through the thicket occasioned so much pain, were of those who had wildly wasted or "done violence to," according to

Virgil's description, their substance. Saddened by this encounter, the poets proceed upon their further way, to the next division of the circle of the violent, where are punished those who have been guilty of blasphemy or violence to God.

" Love of my native place moved me to reach
The broken leaves, and gently back I laid
His twigs by him, already hoarse with speech.
And going thence we reached the end which made
Division 'twixt the third and second round,
Where justice its most fearful acts displayed.
That these new things may be with meaning crowned,
I say that here we reached a naked plain,
Upon whose arid bed no plant is found.
The sad wood circles it, a wreath of pain,
In its turn circled by the gloomy brook.
Here paused we on the edges of the plain,
A stretch of close and arid sand, that took
The self-same aspect as that baleful shore
Once trod by Cato's foot. Oh who could look,
Vengeance of God, on all my eyes looked o'er,
Unmoved! How dreadful should Thy power appear
To those who read what lay my sight before!
For many crowds of naked spirits there
I saw, by divers laws of torment bound;
But all in misery, weeping many a tear:
Some supine lay stretched out upon the ground,
Some seated huddled in a dismal heap,
And some on weary march for ever found.
But most in number they who moving keep
Their round; and least who lay in torment low,
In action still, but louder as they weep.
Over this sand rained, with a downfall slow,
Dilated flakes of fire, as, when the wind
Is still, falls soft on Alpine peaks the snow.

. . . . . .

So the eternal fire-flakes noiseless dropped,
While all the sand glows red, as glows the loaf
Within the oven, doubling pain; nor stopped
The miserable hands, still shaking off,
Now here, now there, new burnings, ceaseless toil."

The only figure identified among the blasphemers is Capaneus, one of the "Seven against Thebes," still defying Jove and Vulcan, whose thunderbolts he scorns—whom Virgil reproves for his pride with unusual sharpness. They go on then in silence to the bank of a little rivulet which issues from the wood, and which affords with its stony margin a path level with the wood's edge, on which they still stand, carefully keeping their feet from the burning sand. This stream is so red that Dante shivers at sight of it, but not less at the account of its origin; the mystic description of which, however, except as allegorically enhancing the dark mystery and depth of woe about, would interest the reader, we think, much less than the next encounter, which takes place when the wayfarers are crossing, by the help of the stony margin of the red brook, the circle of glowing sand which they had just threaded at its extreme edge. The stony embankments of this stream are like the dykes made by the Flemings to keep out the sea, Dante tells us, or like those which the Paduans have built along the Brenta; and on this the two poets pass secure, and look over the fiery wilderness, the stream itself sending up a smoke which quenches the fire-flakes.

"We had already left the wood behind
So far, that, turning, had my eyes been set
Towards it, scarce its place I had divined,
When on the way a crowd of souls we met,

Threading along the margin of the stream,
Who closely at us gazed, as men will yet
Regard each other in the new moon's beam,
Like an old tailor at his needle's eye,
Contracting puckered eyelids. Closely seen,
And thus surveyed by the battalion, I
Was known by one who took me by the coat,
Crying, 'Oh marvel!' When I found that by
The skirts he caught me, keenest gaze I brought
To bear upon his face, so that the brown
And scorched aspèct which else deception wrought,
Hid him from me no more; then bending down
My face, 'Oh, Ser Brunetto, art thou here?'
I cried: and he—'My son, thou wilt not frown
If back returning, while the others steer
Their forward course, Brunetto goes with thee?'
'Far as thou canst!' then cried I; 'or if here
It pleases you to rest, fain will I be
To stay, if he consents with whom I go.'
'Oh son,' he said, 'if of the troop you see
But one his footsteps stayed beneath this snow,
To lie a hundred years, nor raise a hand
To screen him, were his doom. Then forward go;
I at your skirts will come, and join my band
As on they pass, weeping their fortune dread.'
I did not dare descend, but o'er the sand,
Like one who reverent walks, inclined my head.
'Ere thy last hour, what makes thee hither fare?'
Thus he began—'what wondrous fate or meed?
And who is he who guides thee?' 'Unaware
In the serene clear world, ere half life's day
Had passed, I strayed and lost my pathway there,
The time no further gone than yesterday,
Then this, my leader came, and here hath led,
And guides me through these wilds the briefest way.'
'Follow thy star,' thus then to me he said,
'And if it brings to thee no glorious wreath,
Ill have my eyes the signs interpreted.

Had I less early yielded up my breath,
Seeing to thee, the heavens were so benign,
Comfort and guidance in all work and scathe,
To help and save thee, had been gladly mine."

Brunetto goes on to denounce Florence, "that ungrateful, malignant people, who of old came down from Fiesole," and warns Dante that the race will be his enemy for his good deeds; while Dante, with natural emotion, protests that "the dear and good paternal image" of his first instructor has never been absent from his mind, and thanks him for his warning, which he will lay up, he says, to be interpreted by a lady who will know what it means, if he ever gets to her. They then talk of Brunetto's companions, all clerks and great scholars and of much renown, and all punished for the same crime of violence against nature. Then Brunetto sees another troop coming, which is not his, and rushes off to join his own party, commending his 'Tesoro,' a collection of poems, to the charge of his pupil, as the only thing he cares to ask. Here there is nothing to mar the mutual tenderness of the meeting. Dante does not spare his former guardian, but he has no blame for him; and Brunetto endures his punishment with a kind of mournful dignity, without having suffered any downfall in his nature by reason of it. His "dear and good image fatherly" is as clear to us as if he had been the most spotless of men. Thus the poet's stern medieval justice, which never hesitates in its awards, interferes with the loving-kindness of his heart only in cases of exceptional offence. And the reader will not fail to remark that the sins of the flesh are invariably treated with gentleness. Brunetto flies over the burning sand to rejoin his party,

dismissed with what would almost be a touch of mockery —as going "like one of those who run for the green cloth in Verona," and of these seeming like him who wins, not him who loses—but for the intense sense of reality in the whole picture, which forbids the idea of invention or anything but closest narrative. Ere he has disappeared, three shades separate themselves from the approaching band, in whom only the same tremendous seriousness of descriptive reality prevents us once more from perceiving something grotesque. But we have already been told that the tormented spirits in this circle are not permitted to stand still, so that it ceases to be extraordinary that the new-comers, in order to indulge their desire to speak with their countryman, "form themselves into a wheel;" by which means, rushing round in close conjunction, they fulfil their sentence, yet are able to remain in the same place. The three are well-known Florentine patriots, whom Dante held in the highest honour—two of them being among the number of those concerning whom he asked Ciacco in the beginning of his journey. If he could have had any shelter from the fire, he would have thrown himself below, in his eagerness to embrace them. "Tell us," they ask him, "do courtesy and valour still dwell in our city as they were wont to do?" The reason of this question is, that Guglielmo Borsiere, but lately arrived among them, has "tormented" them, amid their torments, with what he has told them on this point. "O Florence!" cries Dante, in a significant apostrophe, raising his face, "new rulers and sudden gains have filled thee with pride and disorder, so that already thou weepest." The three noble companions "looked one at the other, as men look when some new truth is told."

This intelligence is sharp to them as the burning of those fire-flakes, which for the moment they seem to have forgotten. Then they, too, disappear as quickly as you could say "Amen."

By this time the travellers have come to the mouth of the chasm by which they must descend to the next round, and here a curious, unexplained incident occurs. The red water whose course they have been following falls resounding, over the precipice, so loudly, that they can scarcely hear each other speak; upon which Dante unlooses from his waist the cord girt round him, at the command of his guide, who throws it down into the gloomy depth. Dante does not understand the action, nor do we. The allusion may probably be to the cord of St Francis, which the poet wore as a member of the Tertiary order, and so may represent, as some believe, a renunciation of all trust in himself or his own righteousness; but why the flinging away of this cord should produce out of these depths the monster Geryon, by whom the poets are to be carried below, it is hard to say — and the only explanation given by the commentators is a forced one. This wonderful creature, the emblem of fraud, has the face of a just man of benign aspect, but the body of a huge and disgusting reptile. As they descend towards him, Dante perceives another wretched band a little further on, seated on the burning sand, and is sent by his guide to look at them while Virgil himself conciliates the waiting monster. These are usurers, who sit in perpetual conflict with the flames, like dogs in summer who pursue the insects that trouble them with snout and paw. They are too despicable to be recognised, but bear round their miserable necks

pouches blazoned with the arms of noble Italian families, as if in mockery of their humiliation. Dante casts but one searching look upon them, unworthy as they are even to be gazed at, then hurries back lest his Master should chide. He finds Virgil already mounted upon the terrible steed, but himself shivers and grows pale with terror; and is only induced to mount by the "menacing words" of his Master, to whom he would have made a despairing appeal to hold him in his arms had any voice been left to him. Virgil, however, answers unasked this voiceless appeal, and the monster backs out from the steep rock, and descends the horrible shaft. Slowly he goes down, circling and circling, the roaring of the whirlpool growing louder, the wind of their going striking upon Dante's face and feet, and gleams of fire and sounds of lamentation increasing the horrible confusion of this sinking and whirling. There is no picture more terrible in the whole dread narrative—the darkness, the gleams of fire, the cries of misery, all conjoined with the hideous roaring of the bloody cascade, the horrible chasm of iron rock, the sickening sense of motion, the appalling monster who conveys them; nothing is wanting to the horror of the scene. Miserable enough has been the condition and punishment of the sinners above; but this is indeed the lowest depths of Hell to which we have arrived — a combination of everything most terrible and disgusting, sufferings loathsome and vile, without amelioration of any kind; degradation at once awful and grotesque. The poet himself, as he sinks gradually into the depths of this horrible pit, is sick and paralysed with mingled pain and fear.

MALEBOLGE.

"Malebolge is a place in Hell, all of stone, and of an iron colour. . . . Right in the middle yawns a well, exceeding deep and wide." The border or rim between the precipice which the poets have just descended, and which rises in sheer walls of stone all around, and the pit in the midst, is divided into ten separate portions ("valleys"), connected with cliffs or bridges of rock, like the succession of ditches which surround a strong fortification—all tending towards the dark well in the centre. The name Malebolge means evil pits or holes, and the crowd which occupies these places of torment is multitudinous. Here, too, there are demon attendants, horned, and armed with scourges, who drive the sufferers on, and prevent them from pausing. The first of the ditches contains those deceivers who have betrayed women for gain, or by cruel lies — panders and seducers. "Ruffian, there are no women here to be made money of!" cries the devil, who whips on a wretch of Bologna, whom Dante recognises. Among these also, however, a nobler figure, comes the regal shade of Jason, who scorns to shed a tear. "With him go all who practice the like deceit," says Virgil; "and let this suffice." The second ditch, more horrible still, is filled with excrement; and in this are immersed, with hideous appropriateness, the flatterers. The third is for the simonists, and it is full of holes made in the stone—about the same size, Dante bethinks himself, as the baptismal fonts in his own beautiful San Giovanni, the Baptistery of Florence, one of which he once broke to

save a drowning child. In these round stones are stuck the simonists, head downward, their feet and legs emerging, the soles burning with such a low intense flame as comes from an oiled surface. Dante's curiosity is excited by one of these wretches, whose feet glow with ruddier flame than any of the others, and whose limbs jerk with more agonised and convulsive movement; and they descend close to this unhappy one. The punishment, it is said, is suggested by a horrible torture known in Dante's time, when assassins were thus buried alive; and the poet thus describes the encounter:—

"I stood like the friar who is confessing a treacherous assassin—one who, after being fixed, recalls the priest to delay his death. And he cried, 'Art thou there already standing, Boniface? Art thou there already standing? By several years the prophecy has lied to me. Art thou so quickly sated with that wealth, for which thou didst not fear to seize the beautiful Lady, and then make havoc of her?' I was as one who is mocked, not understanding what is said, or knowing what to answer."

Virgil tells his companion to reply, "I am not he whom thou expectest;" and the disappointed soul, with a fresh convulsion, explains who he is. He is Nicholas III., a recent Pope, one of the great house of Orsini, "a son of the She-Bear, so anxious to advance the whelps, that above I put money into the purse, and here myself." The successor whom he waits for eagerly, and whom at first he believed Dante to be, was no less a person than the reigning Pope Boniface, ordained, so the poet proclaims with his usual daring, to take his place in this everlasting burning, and here expiate his greed and spoiling of "the beautiful Lady," the Church whom he had

profaned on earth. So strongly moved with indignation is Dante at this sight, that he cannot refrain from a fierce gibe at the consecrated culprit. "How much treasure, tell me," he cries, "did our Lord require of St Peter when he gave the keys into his keeping?" and changing from his usual position of listener, he denounces the avarice of Rome, and identifies her as the great harlot—the Babylon of the Apocalypse. "Ah, Constantine!" he cries, "how much harm was caused, not by thy conversion, but by that dower which the first rich Shepherd took from thee!" Pope Nicholas listens with increasing convulsions of his burning feet, though whether it was rage or conscience that gnawed him, could not be told; while Virgil stands looking on with a look so satisfied, that Dante thinks the outburst gave him pleasure. Then taking him up in his arms, the elder poet carries his charge to the top of the cliff again, passing lightly upwards with his burden, severe though the climbing was. This brings us to another valley or ditch. Here the poet makes a pause, for the first time, to denounce this class of hopeless criminals. The whole of the nineteenth canto is an eloquent invective against that sin which ravaged the Church—the greed which sold her offices and her sacraments, and made vulgar gain of the most sacred things. The quivering wretch, with his flaming feet, and the twists and wrenches with which he betrays his susceptibility to blame and capacity for further suffering, brings no pity to the poet's indignant heart.

Through the next round comes a dismal procession, slow as the train at a funeral, so distorted that their faces are turned to their backs, and can only look

behind them. These are the diviners and soothsayers of all classes — those who in earth have pretended to penetrate the darkness of the future, but now are condemned to look only backward, while their bodies creep forward through the gloom. This sight is so pitiful that Dante leans upon the rock, overcome by it, and cannot refrain from weeping, for which Virgil reproves him sharply. "Art thou like the other fools?" he cried, "reviving pity where it ought to be dead?" The greater part of this wizard band are of the classic age. Tiresias of Thebes, and Manto his daughter, are conspicuous figures; and there, too, appears Michael Scott, familiar name, "small in the flanks," one cannot tell why; and a wretched horde of women—witches with their herbs and images.

The next two cantos contain the most wonderful interlude of grim comedy amid the misery and the glooms. We have now arrived at the place where dishonesty, public and private, has its punishment. The "barterers," peculators, cheats of every description, lie here in a stream of boiling pitch, which recalls to the poet the Venice arsenal, in all its busy preparations for sea, where the boiling of "the tenacious pitch" is accompanied by the din of hammers, the twisting of ropes, the bustle of mending and making. How different is the scene which recalls to him all that cheerful activity! As Dante gazes through the dark air into the black bubbles and heavings of the ditch, his guide suddenly warns him of danger with a cry; and turning round, Dante, with a quiver of terror, perceives a demon close to him. How fierce he looked, and how sharp and biting in ill-will, light of foot, with dark wings outspread! Upon his high and meagre shoulders a

sinner was mounted. "Here, Malebranche, ill-clutchers of our bridge," he shouts—"here is one of St Zita's elders;" and flinging the criminal into the pitch, he rushes off over the cliff to bring more from "the city which is well provided with them." It is Lucca that is thus indicated—and Dante, clinging to Virgil, gazes at the spectacle with terror; but he is soon involved in a more alarming personal peril. The demons are too dangerous to be passed without parley; and Virgil, as once before, goes forth to negotiate with them alone, leaving Dante hidden behind a jag of rock. "With that fury with which the dogs rush at the poor man who stops to seek alms, the demons rushed from beneath the bridge, and turned upon him all their hooks." Virgil, however, warns them to be calm, and requests that one of them may advance to parley. "Let it be Malacoda," cry the ruffian spirits. The Master then addresses this representative, bidding him perceive, that not without the Divine will could he have come so far. "It is willed in heaven that I lead another by this wild way." The demon is subdued, and Virgil calls to Dante to join him, who approaches trembling—upon which the devils press forward to see this wonder; and Dante, doubly alarmed, remembers the march-out of the besieged from Caprona, under the evil eyes of their enemies, unwilling, though pledged, to let them go. The fierce group eye him over with eager looks, and grumble to each other. "Shall I touch him on the haunch?" says one; and another, "See thou nick him!" There is the very grotesque of terror, horrible yet contemptible, in their villanous interchange of threats, and the hungry looks they cast at the tempting prey.

Malacoda, however, the captain, directs the travellers

how to go by the cliff, which was shattered "twelve hundred and sixty-six years" before—that is, when "the rocks were rent" at the Crucifixion—and sends a guard of ten fiends with them, who are bound that way, "to see if any sinner be out airing himself." The very names of these demons carry out the impression of grotesque horror: Barbariccia, Cagnazzo, Libicocco, Draghignazzo, tusked Ciriatto, and Graffiacane. They are like the hideous fiends in Albert Durer's famous wood-engravings, with deformed, horrible faces, snouts, and tusks, and with hooks in their hands. When they see a wretched soul poke his miserable head out from the pitch, they rush at him with their hooks, and turn him over and over, "like cooks dipping the flesh into the middle of the caldron." Dante's heart sinks within him at the sight of these ruffian attendants, but Virgil soothes him, and restores his courage; and to escape the sight of them, he fixes his eyes upon the bubbling river of pitch, in which sometimes there appears the back of some unhappy being, like that of a dolphin turning in the water, or like a frog with his head just visible on the edge. One of these wretches is interrogated by the poets, but it is hard to keep the demons off him for long enough to get an answer. Their boisterous eagerness to get at their victims, and pleasure in their task, have not even the refinement of spiritual cruelty in them, but are rude and coarse as their natures. They quarrel over the wretch, which shall be first to plant his fangs or his prong, and keep up a greedy wrangle of ruffianism on the bank. One seizes him by the arm, another snatches at the legs, while the captain himself keeps off the rest, only that he may get the sinner into his own clutches.

The climax of the horrible farce comes in a still more grotesquely horrible incident. The unhappy thief whom they are tormenting, and whose cunning has not deserted him even in the pitch, eagerly answers to the question of the poets, whether there is any Latin among his companions—that if the Malebranche will but stand a little aside, he will bring up half-a-dozen by a whistle, which is their signal when the coast is clear. The demons are beguiled, and yielding to their desire for prey, accept this offer, and, with threats and suspicious watchfulness, agree to withdraw a little. The moment this is done, the sinner, wary and deceitful still, springs from the bank to which they have dragged him, and with one spring, escapes under the pitch, where he is safe from them. The demon Alichino, who has agreed to the bargain, flies after him headlong, but too late, and turning upward on his huge wings discomfited, meets another, Calcabrina, who has followed, and closes with him in a struggle of mutual rage and disappointment. Thus both together fall into the midst of the boiling pitch, where they drop asunder, forced by the heat, but have their wings so beglued that they cannot rise. Seizing the opportunity while the others fish them out with their hooks, the poets fly onward and escape, gaining the bank of the next chasm, to which the Malebranche dare not ascend, before the demons can follow them.

This wonderful, grim horse-play, like a scene out of a rude medieval "Mystery," breaks into the gloomy solemnity of the hell-journey with extraordinary force and grotesque power. The action is so animated; the descriptions, as always, so intensely real; the rude, horrible figures

so lifelike,—that the reader seems to be present at some *spectacle* of the Cyclops or Titans, to hear the hoarse, hideous, ferocious voices, the harsh oaths and laughter, the ludicrous discomfiture which may turn to any tragic cruelty or horror of destruction. The human rogue is a god in comparison with those rude, horrific images of evil, vulgar and remorseless; and the sight of them mauling each other over the pitch is enough to make Hell laugh, if Hell were not too dreadfully occupied with its sufferings to laugh at anything. The contrast of the two disgusted wayfarers, pale with indignation and righteous rage—yet in Dante's case, at least, with terror—and the lovely tenderness of the image by which Virgil's devotion to his charge is described, throws out with tenfold force the abomination that goes before. "Suddenly my leader took hold upon me, as a mother, woke by the noise of fire, seeing the flames near her, seizes her child and flies, nor waits to think that only her nightgown covers her." What more beautiful contrast could be to the previous jar of fierce passion and brutality supreme?

In the next ditch the poets find a "painted people," going round with steps so slow, that at every movement of their freer limbs, the wayfarers find themselves abreast of a new group. They were dressed in great cloaks, "like those the monks wear at Cologne," with hoods over their eyes, gilded on the outside, but all lead within. When Dante makes his usual inquiry whether any Tuscans are among the sufferers, two Bolognese answer, who make an effort to hurry forward at the sound of his language, with cry of wonder, "He seems alive, by the movement of his throat!" These two, eminent in "the college of the hypocrites," are of an order, called Frati

Godenti, or joyous friars, permitted to keep their worldly possessions, in order to befriend widows and orphans. As Dante begins to reply to these companions, who have painfully panted towards him in their leaden cloaks, he is suddenly stopped by catching sight of a wretched figure crucified on the ground in the path before their feet. This is Caiaphas, "who counselled the Pharisees that it was expedient to martyr one man for the people," and there he lies to be trampled under foot by all who pass. His father-in-law, Annas, is tormented in a similar way in another place. Virgil stands wondering over this crucified one, while the others talk, with a fine touch of wistful amazement, to see the man who had thus rejected that hope of salvation which never came in his own way; then rousing up, asks how to go on, and finds that the demons of the previous circle have lied to him in their directions—a lie which the hypocrites cynically yet sensibly point out to be quite natural, the Devil being the father of lies, when Virgil shows anger at the deception. The next canto begins with one of those beautiful descriptions of nature which, suddenly breaking into the solemn gloom of the surroundings, are so characteristic of Dante:—

"At that young season of the early year,
When in Aquarius the sun dips his locks,
And night and day the same dimensions wear;
When the hoarfrost upon the champaign mocks
The image of her sister dazzling white,
Yet in the mild air but a moment frocks
With whiteness earth,—the peasant, needy wight,
Rises and gazes forth, the country sees
Veiled with the rime, and, turning back, will smite
Impatiently his hands upon his knees,

And to and fro will through his cottage tread,
With aimless round; but as his plaints appease
His rage, opens the door, puts out his head,
Finds all the landscape changed, and hope regains,
Takes up his crook, and from the wintry shed
Drives forth his sheep to pasture on the plains."

The sudden changes of feeling in Dante's mind, which he thus compares to those of the villager, are occasioned by the troubled, and then reassured, countenance of Virgil, to whom the broken rock which they had now to climb had seemed for the moment beyond Dante's powers. And this terror was so reasonable, that the poet reaches the top with all his strength and almost all his courage exhausted; and only a strenuous address from his leader stimulates him to go on, which he does at length, "talking that he might seem stronger than he felt." When they have surmounted the arch, and can see down upon the other side, a horrible sight awaits them. The chasm is full of "a fearful throng of serpents," among which a crowd of naked people are running, transfixed and wreathed about with those crawling reptiles, their hands tied behind their back with serpents. One falls before Dante's eyes, through whom a venomous snake has shot itself, at the junction of the neck and shoulders, and, taking fire, burns in a moment and is turned into ashes; but only to spring up again, like the Phœnix, to endure renewed tortures. This miserable being, when restored to his own shape, "looks fixedly around him, all bewildered by the anguish he has undergone." He is Vanni Fucci, and describes himself as a "savage beast," more pleased with a bestial than a human life; but the special aggravation of his

crimes is, that he robbed a sacristy, and falsely imputed the robbery to another. Other horrors follow, interchange of shapes between the serpents and men, one clinging to another in horrible transformation, which is minutely described, with the blasphemous cries of the victims, which make Dante grateful to the serpents that thus rend and punish them. "Rejoice, Florence, who art grown so great that over land and sea thou beatest thy wings!" cries the poet, in bitter irony. "Among the thieves I found five such thy citizens."

The eighth circle is full of lights, like the fire-flies which the peasant sees flickering in the valley in the evening when he rests on the wooded hillside after his work. In each of these flames is a sinner; and one which is forked at the top contains the souls of Ulysses and Diomede, who expiate together the stratagem of the wooden horse which lost Troy, and the other evil counsels they gave—for it is here that the advisers of evil are punished. It is Virgil who adjures these united sinners—"if I merited of you much or little when on earth I wrote high verse"—to pause and speak, and bids Ulysses tell how and when he died. When the classic sufferers pass on, "with license of the gentle poet," another soul pathetically appeals to him "who spake just now in Lombard," and entreats that he in his turn may be spoken to. "If thou hast fallen into this blind world from that sweet Latin land, whence I bring all my guilt, tell me if the Romagnuoli have peace or war," he cries—an address which touches the heart of the reader. This anxious soul is that of a Count of Montefeltro, a soldier who took the habit of St Francis, "at that age when every one should lower sails and gather in his ropes," but

was beguiled into helping Pope Boniface by wicked craft and counsel, encouraged by that Pontiff's promise of absolution—an absolution which, as he found to his terrible cost and wonder, was of no avail to him when his last hour came. "St Francis, when I was dead, came for me; but one of the Black Cherubim said to him, 'Do not take him; wrong me not. Among my wicked ones must he come down. Because he gave counsel for evil, since when I have held him by the hair.'" . . . "Oh me miserable!" cries the sufferer. "How I started back when he seized me, saying, 'Thou didst not think I was a logician!'"

The ninth round plunges us again into horrors, after the comparative ease of the clean flames. Not if all the slaughtered in all the wars were gathered together, Dante tells us, could there be anything to equal the hideous sufferings here. Men cleft and rent asunder, mutilated, ripped up, lacerated with every new invention of bloody wounding, here crowd together. They are the heretics and schismatics who have disturbed the world with strange doctrines. Mahomet, with Ali weeping before him, all mangled and split asunder, is one of the first. And there are, as usual, a crowd of Tuscans among the victims: Piero da Medicina, with one ear, and without a nose, and with his throat pierced through; Mosca, with both hands cut off,—these last also givers of evil counsel; and a wretched sower of dissension, Bertrand de Born, who carries his head like a lantern in his hand. Virgil reproves Dante for gazing so earnestly into the chasm, when it turns out that it is for a sinner of his own family he is looking, a certain Geri, the son of Bello Alighieri, whom Virgil has already seen passing, pointing

out and threatening Dante with his finger. The cause of this spectre's ill-humour is, that his death has remained unavenged; but otherwise his history is obscure. They now mount the cliff once more, and look down into the agonies of the last chasm of Malebolge. And as all the slaughtered on earth were not enough to shadow forth the horrors of the maimed and wounded leaders of heresy, schism, and discord, so not all the lazar-houses of the Maremma, were they put together in one ditch, would give a full idea of the misery and loathsome disease accumulated here in this division of the pit, where "falsifiers," forgers, coiners, and alchemists, are punished. The sight of their torments, and the stench that rises from the crawling mass of disease and corruption, are horrible beyond all description, too dismal and noisome to dwell upon. Just before they reach the final boundaries of this region of horror, they come upon the coiner Adam of Brescia, who sits motionless in the last stage of dropsy; near to whom is "false Sinon, the Greek of Troy," stricken with violent fever. Sinon takes offence at being pointed out, and assails the wretched Adam; and there ensues a strange quarrel between them, each abusing the other for his sins, and with the peculiar foulness of his complaint. Dante, carried away by the strange, grotesque debate, stands listening. "I was standing all intent to hear them, when the Master said to me, 'Now gaze a little longer, and I will quarrel with thee.' When I heard him speak to me in anger, I turned towards him with such shame, as comes back upon me when I but think of it." Lofty is the reproof, and he who gives it. "Even the wish to hear is a mean thing," says the poet, with noble scorn.

And here end the horrors of Malebolge. It is the everlasting sepulchre and abode of Fraud, the world of the dishonest, full, as is fit, of loathsome punishments and base tormenters, devils and sufferers alike—except in one or two instances among the counsellors of evil, where the pangs of an originally higher nature are intensified by the surroundings, which are more base and disgusting than elsewhere, even in Hell. There they lie, wallowing each in their several filth, revolting to every sense; a world of dismal narrowness and baseness, evil-holes, vile ditches, debasing and disgusting misery. Compared to this, the burning sand, snowed over by those dilated fire-flakes, is pure and lofty. Where Fraud bears its eternal penance, everything is in accord with the baseness of the sufferers.

THE LOWEST HELL.

The last and most terrible region of the infernal world is reached in almost as awful a way as that descent of the gloomy shaft, with all its terrors, upon the back of the monster Geryon, which brought the travellers into Malebolge. As they again approach the edge of the pit, after having investigated all the several rounds of Malebolge, in an atmosphere which is something less than night or day, the sound of a horn blowing amid the mists, so loud that it would make the thunder seem weak, directed Dante's eyes towards the centre. There he saw, dimly looming upwards, things which he takes at first to be towers, and asks, "What town is this?" in the haze and confusion. Soon, however, he perceives, aided by Virgil's explanations, that the seeming towers are

gigantic figures, standing half out of the gloomy pit. Gradually, as his eyes gain force to penetrate the darksome air, he discerns these huge shapes, with faces as long as the pine of St Peter's, and vast shoulders heaved above the dark opening, like the crest of towers on the great fortress at Montereggione. The first of these giants babbles wild inarticulate syllables as they approach; and it is he whose horn, half idiotic, half Titanic, had reached the ears of the poet through the darkness. This is Nimrod, "through whose ill device it is that one tongue is not used through the world, and who is now unable either to understand or speak anything but gibberish." The others are Ephialtes and Antæus, the latter of whom, less guilty than his companions, assents to Virgil's request that he will set them down into the still lower depth which has yet to be visited. It is the promise that Dante will be able to "restore thy fame on earth" which moves this giant; and putting forth his hands he takes up Virgil, who in his turn clasps Dante, so that, making but "one bundle," they are lifted by these gigantic arms and placed gently in the depth below. The giant then raises himself again, "like the mast of a ship," and the two poets find themselves on the surface of a frozen and glassy lake, solid but transparent under their feet. This is Cocytus, the lake of eternal ice; and its nature is indicated to Dante by a pitiful voice entreating him to look how he walks, that he may not tread on the heads of his wretched brothers. Out of this frozen surface, like frogs with their faces out of water in the still heat of an autumn night, when the tired villager dreams of the harvest-field, the miserable sufferers project their heads, with their faces bent downward, stiffly frozen into the ice, with

chattering teeth, and tears which congeal in their eyes. Here he is in Caïna, the abode of murderers and traitors. A thousand visages, made dog-like by the cold, glare at him from the ground, some replying to his questions on their own account, some eager to point out their neighbours. One against whom he stumbles unawares cries out violently, "Why trample you upon me? art thou come to take further vengeance for Mont'aperte?" Dante adjures this spirit to tell his name, promising a revival of mortal fame. Contrary, however, to the usage of the spirits, the shade refuses angrily, exciting a suspicion in the poet, which he shows by griping fiercely at the frozen locks, and demanding the name at peril of tearing away the hair—a somewhat cruel advantage, it seems, to take of the frozen and helpless sufferer, who, however, remains obstinately silent. One of his neighbours is less discreet, and cries out, "What ails thee, Bocca?" revealing what the poet would seem to have suspected, the traitor Bocca degli Abate, by whose treachery the Guelf party was defeated at Mont'aperte. Being himself betrayed, this caitiff makes haste to point out others, his partners in infamy. As the poets pass on, they come upon a horrible spectacle—two unhappy sinners who are frozen so closely together in one hole that the head of the one is as a cap or covering to the other; the one who is highest fixes his teeth in the nape of the other wretch's neck and gnaws him, "as hunger gnaws bread." This dreadful sight is explained by the uppermost, who raises his mouth from that fell repast, wiping it on the hair of his victim's head. The story is one of the most horrible incidents in the "Inferno," and also one of the most widely known. It forms a kind of pendant to the tale of Francesca in the second

circle, the beginning of Hell's torments. It is Count Ugolino, chief of the Guelfs in Pisa — several times master and lord of that beautiful city, but himself a traitor and cruel murderer of his opponents—who speaks, and whose miserable death is the subject of the tale. The shade which he gnaws is that of the Archbishop Ruggieri, his own betrayer and murderer. The horrible facts of this story, as well as those of Francesca's guilt and fate, were well known to everybody in Dante's day, having happened only about two years before the date he assigns to his great poem. We will take, as suiting the sternness and conciseness of the record, Dr Carlyle's admirable literal translation :—

"Thou hast to know that I was Count Ugolino, and this the Archbishop Ruggieri : now I will tell thee why I am such a neighbour to him. That by the effect of his ill devices I, confiding in him, was taken and thereafter put to death, it is not necessary to say ; but that which thou canst not have learnt—that is, how cruel was my death—thou shalt hear, and know if he has offended me. A narrow hole within the mew,[1] which from me has the title of Famine, and in which others yet must be shut up, had, through its opening, already shown me several moons, when I slept the evil sleep which rent for me the curtain of the future. This man seemed to me lord and master, chasing the wolf and his whelps upon the mountains for which the Pisans cannot see Lucca. . . . After short course, the father and the sons seemed to me weary, and methought I saw their flanks torn by the sharp teeth. When I awoke before the dawn I heard my sons, who were with me, weeping amid their sleep and asking for bread. Thou art right cruel if thou dost not grieve already at the thought of what my heart foreboded ; and if thou weepest not, at what art thou used to weep ? They were now awake, and the hour approaching at which our food used to be brought us, and

[1] The Tower of Famine.

each was anxious from his dream, and below I heard the outlet of the horrible tower locked up: whereat I looked in the faces of my sons without uttering a word. I did not weep, so stony grew I within. They wept; and my little Anselm said, "Thou lookest so! Father, what ails thee?" But I shed no tear, nor answered all that day, nor the next night, till another sun came forth upon the world. When a small ray was sent into the doleful prison, and I discerned in their four faces the aspect of my own, I bit on both my hands for grief; and they, thinking I did it from desire of eating, of a sudden rose up and said, 'Father, it will give us much less pain if thou wilt eat of us; thou didst put upon us this miserable flesh, and do thou strip it off." Then I calmed myself, in order not to make them more unhappy. That day and the next we all were mute. Ah, hard earth, why didst thou not open? When we had come to the fourth day, Gaddo threw himself stretched out at my feet, saying, 'My father, why helpest thou me not!' There he died; and even as thou seest me, saw I the three fall one by one between the fifth day and the sixth, when I betook me, already blind, to groping over each; and for three days called them after they were dead. Then, fasting had more power than grief.'

"When he had spoken this, with eyes distorted, he seized the miserable skull again with his teeth, which, as a dog's, were strong upon the bone."

This story is the very climax of Hell's horrors. After it, the reader will be but little, comparatively, affected by the vast figure of Lucifer, which is the last of all, or even by Judas, held in the Archfiend's mouth, and gnawed as Ugolino gnaws his betrayer. The fierce human anguish, so real and close to the spectator, moves us as no vaguer and vaster misery can. The tale stands out as if written in pale letters of fire against the background of gloom. Ugolino is not assoilzied of one whit of his deserved suffering in consideration of the cruel torture of his end;

but what pity mingles with the horror, and with what human tenderness the name of his little Anselm trembles upon the fierce tongue of the avenger, remorseless even in Hell, and taking vengeance on his enemy!

The poets go on, awed and silent, from this terrible group, and come now to a variety of torture. Here the sufferers do not bend with faces downward, but lie backward with their faces fixed in the ice. This new sphere is called Ptolomea, and has the special and horrible peculiarity, that here are to be found the true souls of some who still, according to outward appearance, live on earth, their bodies being possessed by demons; while their spirits, more guilty than God can longer bear with, drop summarily into the depths. From this gloomy and horrible surface, all set with those livid faces, a voice of entreaty comes to Dante as he passes. "The very weeping there," he has already told us, "allows them not to weep, and the grief which finds impediment upon their eyes turns inward to increase the agony; for their first tears form a knot, and, like crystal visors, fill up all the cavity beneath their eyebrows." It is in respect to this that he is now appealed to, to "remove the hard veils from my face, that I may vent the grief which stuffs my heart a little ere the weeping freeze again." Dante, with whom the reader can have no sympathy in this mysterious and revolting incident, promises to do this if the spirit will disclose its name, with an imprecation on his own head if he breaks his word. "What! art thou dead?" the poet cries, when he hears that this is Friar Alberigo, who a short time before had been guilty of a treacherous and abominable murder in the city of Faenza. But Friar Alberigo knows nothing of his body, what has become of

it, whether it still lives in possession of a demon or is dead, and he indicates another ghastly face close to him as that of Branca d'Oria, whom Dante declares to be, of his own knowledge, not dead at all, but who still eats and drinks and wears mortal raiment. Nevertheless, it is true that he is here in torment, according to the privilege of the place. "But reach hither thy hand, open my eyes," cries the miserable sufferer. Here for a moment we shrink from our poet, to whom the wickedness of this miscreant affords justification for an act almost as treacherous and cruel as his own. "I opened them not," says Dante, "for courtesy to him would have been villainous." Such a sentiment is entirely unworthy of him. It is only this once, however, that the ferocious justice of the medieval mind interferes with the natural charity and tenderness which vindicate Dante's humanity even in the midst of his sternest judgments.

Further on they go, to the very centre and conclusion of Hell. Here all is silence, for the souls of the tortured are close shut and covered in the ice, through which they appear as through glass; but in the gloomy air there is a whirl and tumult, as of a great mill turning with the wind. This wind Dante has already felt with surprise, not knowing from whence it could come; but the whirl and confused commotion are the chief features here. "The banners of the King of Hell now issue forth towards us," said Virgil, employing, strangely, the first words of a triumphant hymn. Dante shrinks behind his guide, no other screen being possible, and becomes icy chill and hoarse, neither dead nor alive, so that no words could express the condition of which he was conscious. And now, at last, he sees the emperor of this

dolorous realm standing out breast-high from the ice, his arms as much more great than the giants as they were huge beyond the human looker-on; three faces set upon his gigantic head, one fiery red, one dark as Egypt, one of yellow paleness; underneath these, two mighty wings, like great sea-sails, not softly plumed, but like a bat's in form and texture. Three winds come from the flapping of these huge unlovely fans—winds which, with their terrible chill, freeze Cocytus. It is this eternal movement and beating of the air which filled with a dark whirl of confusion and terror the whole dark space about, and overwhelmed Dante with such horror, that he felt himself neither dead nor alive. In each of his mouths the great king of Hell champs a sinner. The one in front, who suffers the uttermost torment, is Judas Iscariot. This is the very apex—or, to use a more appropriate metaphor, the very central depth and sum—of misery to be found in Hell. Imagination refuses to go further, and human nature shrinks from the ineffable eternal woe.

Now, to the intense relief of the travellers and the reader, the end has come; but not yet is Dante freed from the dread oppression and danger. Tremulous, he clings to his guide, not knowing what is to come next, as Virgil dauntlessly sets his foot on the shaggy side of the Evil One—the terrible ladder by which they must reascend towards the light. "When we had come to where the thigh revolves, just on the swelling of the haunch, my guide with labour and difficulty turned his head where his feet had been before, and grappled on the hair as one who mounts." Dante, in alarm, supposes that they are once more descending downwards, but is told by Virgil, with panting breath, to hold fast, and in a moment after

finds himself thrust through the opening of a rock and placed upon the brim to rest. Here, gazing back upon the awful scene he has just left, he finds no longer the high shoulders of the Archfiend towering over him, but only his legs. The travellers have turned upward from the world of darkness, and in a moment all is transposed, and Hell invisible. They now stand breathless and tremulous at the end of a cavernous opening, which leads back to light and a better world: and already those horrible depths are obliterated, and the infernal journey has come to an end.

We leave the explanation of how this is accomplished to the reader, who can, if he is sufficiently interested, learn from better authorities the principles of the old world cosmogony, avowing candidly that it is very dim to ourselves. The depth of Hell is the lowest point of the universe, of which earth is the centre, and the issue from it is in a hemisphere opposed to that which overvaults the known and kindly world—a land of vague space and unexplored sea. The poets have left the infernal regions, but they have not got back to the solid footing of earth. In the meantime, a narrow watercourse, too dark to be visible, but which can be traced by the sound of the stream which trickles through, affords them an opening by which, relieved and calmed, they can issue forth once more beneath the stars.

"Now by the hidden path we quick addrest
Our steps to the clear world, my guide and I,
As men who have no thought or care for rest;
And mounting, saw the fair heavens glimmer high
Through the round opening; and he first, as best
Befits, forth issued 'neath the stars and sky."

CHAPTER IV.

THE 'DIVINE COMEDY:' "PURGATORY."

THE FOOT OF THE MOUNTAIN.

THE ease and relief that fill the mind of the poet when thus he makes his way towards the daylight, and sees from the depths of the subterranean passage the stars, emblems of everything that is heavenly and bright, in the distant sky, are unspeakable. A load is taken from the spirits of both singer and listeners. We have left the hopeless world behind; and though there is still suffering to be seen, it is suffering all irradiated with the consciousness of blessing and delight beyond. The "cruel sea" is past; now upon better waters the voyager raises the sail of his boat of genius, invoking the holy Muses to reanimate dead poetry. It was early morning, and all heaven was bathed in subdued light:—

"The sweetest blue of eastern sapphire, spread
O'er the serene sweet breathing of the air,
High to the first great circle overhead,
Woke new delight within my heart whene'er
Out of the dark, dead sphere of ill I came,
Which eyes and heart had so weighed down with fear.

> The lovely planet, in whose tender flame
> Love comfort finds, made all the orient laugh,
> Veiling the constellation in her train"—

As Dante comes forth into this soft brightness, he sees the Southern Cross in the sky, and compassionates "the widowed North," which is not permitted to behold that miracle. When he has eyes for anything but the beauty of the sky, from which he has been so long shut out, he sees near him a venerable old man, with a long white beard falling on his breast, and a most reverend aspect. The light of those four blessed stars which form the Cross shines on his face, so that he is like the sun. "Who are you who fly from the eternal prisons?" he asks, moving the "honest plumes" of his venerable beard; "who has guided you? What lamp lighted you through that black night? Are the laws of the abyss changed, that the damned can reach my shores?" Virgil, with gentle force, puts Dante on his knees, and himself replies respectfully, that "a lady from heaven" sent him thither to guide this man, "who has not yet beheld his last evening," and who goes through all the realms of the spiritual world, seeking "Freedom, which is so dear, as those know who for her sake resign life." "Thou knowest it," he adds—"thou for whom it was not bitter to give up for her in Utica that body which shall be so glorious at the great day." For this is Cato, one of the few classic worthies who has attained to the place of hope, and who holds the office of guardian of the shores of Purgatory. Virgil continues, with a certain obsequiousness, to explain that no laws are broken by their coming, since he himself has never been judged by Minos, but is of that circle where shine "the chaste eyes

of thy Marzia," to whom he says—pleading, as if with a doubt of favour—he will carry news of her husband, if Cato cares to be remembered in that lower world. Cato, however, puts aside this plea of Marzia, who, now that she dwells beyond the evil river, has no more power to move him; but acknowledges the right of the "lady from heaven" to command his services, and bids Virgil pass on, commanding him to wash from Dante's face the stains of the infernal smoke, and to gird him with one of the reeds which grow along the water-margin. When this permission is given, Dante rises, not venturing to speak, and follows his guide to the shore:—

"Now vanquished, morn's grey shadows yield and flee
Before the day; and in the distance, bright
We saw afar the shiver of the sea."

On their way they come to a shady place where the dew still lies, and the Master spreads both his hands upon the grass. Dante, perceiving what he means, turns towards him his tearful cheeks, and is thus washed in the morning dews of Purgatory from the stains of Hell and night. Nothing can be more beautiful than those images of refreshment and hope, the magical morning light, "sweet colour of eastern sapphire," turning from starlight to sunlight: the tremulous shimmer afar of the sea: the dew upon the grass; what a change from the blackness and darkness, the smoke and lurid lights, the dismal chill of the ice lake, frozen by that fierce wind from Satan's wings! Nothing is omitted that can mark the contrast of this morning world, so still and sweet. Finally, Dante is girdled with the "humble plant," which is no sooner plucked than another waves, slender stem

springs in its place. The reed girdle is supposed to symbolise the humility and simplicity needful in the world of penance and hope.

This being accomplished, the pair of travellers linger on the shore watching the rising of the sun, like those who plan their way, "going with the heart, but with the body standing still," when Dante perceives a light approaching over the sea so quickly, that no flight could equal its speed. As it comes nearer, it grows brighter and greater, and on either side rises "something of white," he cannot tell what, and turns his eyes wondering to the Master, who gives no explanation at first of the coming wonder. When he begins to perceive that the whiteness is wings, Virgil calls to him, "Down on your knees! Behold the angel of God!" No oar or sail is needed by the celestial pilot who thus approaches, borne on by those eternal plumes which fan the air as he stands on the prow. More than a hundred spirits are seated in the light and rapid boat that thus comes swift like a divine bird through the morning. "In exitu Israel," they sing with one voice; and their angelic boatman, making the sign of the cross as they throw themselves upon the blessed shore, hastens away again as swiftly as he came. The reader will remember the weeping and writhing of Acheron, and the rude ferryman who insults his miserable passengers. The crowd of new-comers look round them as strangers look, wondering and admiring, and ask the pair whom they find there which is the way to ascend the mount. "We are pilgrims like you," Virgil tells them, "arrived but a little while before, and by a way bitter and hard." Here, however, a touching incident occurs:—

"Soon as it was perceived by this fair host
That I still lived, as by my breath was seen,
Marvelling they crowded round in wonder lost;
And as a messenger with olive green
Borne in his hands, draws from all pathways round
An eager crowd, not shy, but thronging keen
Each on his neighbour—gazing thus was found
Each soul of all these spirits fortunate,
Forgetting half upon what errand bound.
Then saw I one approach me at such rate
Of tender haste, with open arms and kind,
As moved me to like act; but ah! vain state
Of shadows, but in outward show combined
With substance! Thrice around his form I threw
My arms; thrice found them empty: then my mind
With wonder filled my looks: the shade withdrew
Smiling, I quickly following; gently he
Stopt me with softest accents; then I knew,
And prayed that he would pause and speak to me.
'As once in mortal frame I loved thee, now
So faithful turns the separate soul to thee
In love,' he said; 'but thou? where goest thou?'
'Oh, my Casella! back to my old place
On earth again I journey thus; but how,
Lingering, art thou kept back from higher grace?'
. . . . . .
'If new laws have not severed from your thought
All use and memory of gentle song,
Which once such calm throughout my being wrought,
Please thee, once more console, on journey long,
My soul, that with its body still opprest,
Goes breathless here and labouring;' then the song
'Love in my mind' beginning, he addrest
Himself to sing, so sweet that in my heart
The music echoes still: around him prest
My Master, I, and all the band whose part
Was like his own—all rapt in such content
As having no concern but with this art:
So fixed on every note were all intent,"

The song sung by Casella is one of Dante's own, the most touching homage which a singer can pay to a poet. While they thus listen, the guardian of the place comes up wondering, and cries, "Slow spirits, what negligence is this? Hasten to the mount, to clear you of your stains." "As doves gathering grain from the fields," says Dante, "when something appears that alarms them, without showing their usual pride, suddenly leave the food, assailed by more urgent need; so the crowd of spirits fled from this new-comer, and rushed towards the coast—nor was our own movement less swift." Virgil, indeed, goes on with such shame and remorse in his looks that his pupil exclaims, "Oh worthy and pure conscience, how art thou bitten by a little fault!" Dante himself becomes alarmed when, turning their faces towards the ascent, he sees the sunshine in front of him broken by but one shadow, which is his own. He turns round quickly, his heart trembling with fear that he is abandoned; but is soon consoled by his guide, who bids him not be over-eager to know everything, or how it is that bodies which cast no shadow can yet feel heat and cold. They are now beginning the ascent of the hill, which is so steep and terrible that the roughest road between Lerice and Turbia is in comparison an easy stair. "Who knows at what side is the slope?" Virgil cries, himself half moved to despair; "who can go up without wings?" While, however, he thus anxiously examines the way, Dante sees a group of spirits on the left hand, approaching so slowly that they scarcely seem to move their feet; and to this party the poets resolve to address themselves. The approaching band, however, are timid, and stand upon their guard, establishing themselves in

the shelter of the cliffs when Dante and Virgil draw near, then coming out by twos and threes, as sheep issue from the fold, to reconnoitre. A certain timidity is indeed apparent in all the spirits on the edge of Purgatory. They are not assured and certain of themselves, like the wretches in the Inferno; but doubtful, apparently, of what every new sign may portend. They too stand in alarm to see Dante's shadow; but at last are reassured, and give their instructions where to find the practicable ascent. One among them, who was "fair and handsome, and of gentle aspect," but had one of his eyelids divided by a blow, calls to Dante, and asks if he recognises him. It is Manfred, the King of Naples, the nephew of the Empress Costanza, who charges Dante to go to his beautiful daughter Costanza, the Queen of Aragon, and tell her how he came by his death—"the truth, let others say what they will." He is one of those who repented in the last moments of his existence, "weeping to Those who willingly pardon," only when he had received two mortal wounds. After this encounter they come to a narrow opening, which the spirits point out as the way. Many a better opening, the poet says, has been made by a villager, when the grapes ripen, with the forked end of his stake. Here, however, they begin to toil upward, sometimes on hands and feet, and at last reach a path which winds round the hill, where they seat themselves to rest. Here Dante's surprise to find the sun on his left hand is the occasion of an astronomical discourse from Virgil, which we leave as quite beyond our powers of explanation. In this mysterious scientific difficulty, as in many historical ones, the reader who wishes to sound the depths of Dante's

lore, human and divine, will be able to find very sufficient guides; and to these we leave him, if his curiosity or interest is sufficiently excited. Virgil encourages Dante, with respect to the hardness of the way, by telling him that the further they ascend the easier it will become. A voice here interrupts them, saying, "Yet perhaps you may be forced to rest from weariness;" and turning round, they perceive several spirits taking refuge in the shade behind a rock, one of whom Dante describes as "lazier than if Laziness were his sister." This little episode is tenderly comic. The indolent spirit is seated embracing his knees, and lets drop now and then a half-mocking word: "Go on, thou who art so strong!" and "So! you have found out that the sun is on your left." Dante goes to him, though still breathless with climbing, and "moved a little to laughter" by his lazy looks and broken words. "Belacqua," he says, "no longer will I grieve for you; but why stay here? Are you awaiting some one, or have your old habits sway over you still?" "Brother," says the indolent but saved sinner, "what is the good of going up, when the angel of God, who is seated at the door, will not let me pass? Too long I put off the good sighs; and if prayer do not aid me from hearts which live in grace, nothing else is heard in heaven." Here Virgil moves, and calls away his pupil, and we hear no more of the idle penitent. There he sits embracing his knees, in the shade, on the warm mountain-side, out of all final danger—the lazy, careless Florentine—and may be there still, for anything Dante says.

As they go on again, meeting one party after another, all are thunderstruck by the shadow which obscures the sunshine where Dante stands. One troop which comes

singing the "Miserere" in alternate voices, when they catch sight of this shadow, change their song into "an 'O!' long and hoarse," so deeply are they astonished. Virgil, who has just reproved Dante for troubling himself about this wonder, explains it to the singing band, and calls Dante's attention to the fact that they are anxiously endeavouring to catch his attention—their reason for this being, that the living mortal among them may carry back news of them to earth. They were, to tell the truth, not at all the sort of persons whom their kinsfolk on earth could expect to be met with here; so that the news was agreeable as well as important. One of them describes, indeed, how the ill angel who came to get him at his death, grumbled against heaven which had secured him, as gaining a soul "by one poor little tear." Those who name themselves are Jacopo del Cassero, Buonconte di Montefeltro, and the poor lady Pia, who was "unmade" in a fever-stricken castle in the Maremma, where her cruel husband had placed her. Like him who has gained at dice, who goes away surrounded by his party—some before him, some behind—listening to them as he walks on, not stopping, clearing the crowd from him with his hand; so was Dante, he tells us, among the crowd, turning his head here and there, and promising what they wished. The desire of all is, that he should remind their friends of them, and thus secure prayers for their advancement in Purgatory. When they are free of this crowd, Virgil and Dante discuss the difficult question of prayer, as we discuss it to this day. "You seem to deny expressly in your text, O my light!" says Dante,[1] "that the decrees

[1] The following are the words to which Dante refers:—"Desine fata Deûm flecti sperare precando."

of heaven are ever changed by prayer. Is then the hope of these spirits vain?" "It is neither vain, nor is my doctrine false," says Virgil, "if regarded with a sane mind;" but he refers his charge to Beatrice to solve all doubts. "Thou shalt see her on high, at the top of this mountain, smiling and happy." "Dear leader!" cries the poet-lover, "let us hasten on. I am no longer weary." While they talk thus, they perceive a lonely spirit with his face turned towards them, from whom they ask directions how they are to find the shortest way:—

"Oh, Lombard soul! how proud and silent thou
In lofty musing stood, with solemn eyes
Scarce moving slow beneath thy steadfast brow!
No word he spake; but in such noble guise
As a reposing lion, on us stayed
His look, while round we passed, in curious wise.
Then Virgil, drawing near, petition made
That he would show where best we might ascend.
To our demand no answering word he said,
But of our country asked, and how might tend
Our lives. When thus my gentle guide began,
'Mantua——;' all eager ere he made an end
The spirit turned from where he stood, 'A man,
O Mantuan! of thy land, Sordello, I.'
And quick embracing one to th' other ran."

"Ah, thou slave Italy! hostelry of grief!" cries Dante, "that gentle soul was thus moved only by the sweet accents of his native land; and now there is not one of thy citizens but wars with the rest, and they rend each other who were born within the same moat and wall." The rest of the canto is full of this indignant protest. "Search round thy borders if there is peace anywhere," he cries. "O Justinian! what avails to mend the bridle

when the saddle is empty?" The reader will prefer, however, to this indignant apostrophe, the wonder and joy of Sordello when he hears who his visitor is:—

"When o'er and o'er this joyful greeting true
Had been repeated, to remembrance brought,
Sordello paused, and questioned, 'Who are you?'
'Ere ever on this mountain had been wrought
By worthy souls to God the high ascent,
I to my grave was by Octavian brought;
Virgil I am: for no impediment,
Save want of faith, the heavenly state I lost.'
Thus spoke my guide; and lo! as one intent
On something sudden seen his path that crost,
Marvelling, believing, doubting still, who cries,
'Tis he! nay, 'tis not he,' his being tost
With wonder, stood Sordello; then his eyes
He drooped, and humbly to the Master came,
Embracing, there where low the suppliant lies,
His knees. 'O thou by whom our tongue may claim
Its highest meed! glory of Latins! praise
Eternal of the city whence I came!
What grace, what merit, to this height can raise
Me worthless, that thy noble words I hear?"

After this recognition, Virgil informs Sordello in what region he himself dwells, and asks where the real Purgatory begins; for these mountain-slopes, inhabited by spirits who have delayed their repentance till their last moments, and who here wander about at will, awaiting permission to enter, are but the vestibule of the place of hopeful punishment. Sordello tells him that spirits like himself are not confined to any one place, but are permitted to go round the mountain, and offers himself as their guide as far as he may go. But as night is coming on, when it is not safe to move about, he proposes to

guide them to a "beautiful sojourn" where they can pass the hours of darkness. They go on accordingly under his guidance to a lovely flowery valley, a hollow scooped out of the mountain-side. A winding path conducts into this hollow; but first their guide bids them pause on the height and look down into it, as they will there more easily see the inhabitants. The flowers were more brilliant than gold and silver, and scarlet grain—more sweet than Indian wood — more fresh than emeralds; nature was never seen so painted with sweet colour, and a thousand odours made themselves into one fragrance beyond naming; and from amid the grass and the flowers rose the hymn "Salve Regina," sung by a multitude of spirits who could not be seen outside of these sheltering banks. The first whom Sordello points out to them is the Emperor Rudolph, he "who might have healed the wounds of Italy," and who does not sing with the others, but looks as if he had neglected something he ought to have done. Many other kings and princes inhabit this tranquil and beautiful place; alone among them sits "Henry of England, the king of simple life." While the poets are gazing down upon this royal company singing its evening hymn among the flowers, the sweet twilight descends over the scene; and there are no more beautiful verses in the whole poem than those in which Dante reflects the exquisite sentiment and tender beauty of this evening hour.

"It was the hour which homeward turns the mind
Of men at sea, and melts their heart, when they
Parting that morn have left sweet friends behind,
And pricks the heart, as lingering, on his way
Goes Love's new pilgrim, when afar he hears
The distant bell that mourns the ending day."

While the twilight thus softly descends, and the thoughts of travellers turn to the sweet friends they have left, and longing pricks at the heart of the pilgrim, some one, rising up amid the company, raises his hands to heaven with a devout countenance, and intones the "Te lucis ante" "so devoutly," says Dante, "and with notes so sweet, that I was carried out of myself;" while all the company with the same grateful devotion follow his example, raising their rapt faces to heaven and joining in the song. When it is ended, as this "gentle army" still stand with their eyes fixed on the sky in expectation, two angels with swords of flame which are broken at the end, clothed in robes of tender green like newly-opened leaves, descend swiftly from the sky and place themselves on either height. The poet sees their fair heads, but their faces dazzle him with the light that shines from them. "They come," Sordello tells them, "to guard the valley from a serpent which is approaching." Now it is safe, he thinks, to descend into the valley and talk with the great shadows there. No sooner have they descended than Dante meets with a friend, Nino Visconti, the "gentle judge" of Gallura, who gives him a warm welcome, and bids the poet recall him to the memory of his daughter Giovanna, that she may help him by her prayers. While they are talking, and while Dante with eager eyes gazing at the heavens has discovered three glorious stars which are new to him, Sordello calls their attention to the dreaded serpent, which is entering the valley by the lower side, where there is no protection. Observing this reptile as it glides between the grass and flowers, bending its head upon its [illegible], Dante does not perceive how the angels move; but [illegible] the evil intruder, feel

ing the air fluttered by their wings, flies again, and the celestial guardians return to their post. There could not be a more beautiful picture; the great refulgence of the unknown stars in the sky, the angelic sentinel on each height, the noble group reposing amid the flowers, their divine song scarcely ceased, all danger flying from their happy valley protected by heaven. Dante, weary with his long wanderings, overcome by the peace of the place, and having still "so much of Adam" to encumber him, drops asleep as he sits with his friends on the grass. While he slept he dreamed that he saw an eagle fluttering over him with feathers of gold, and that, being in the same place where Ganymede was, he too was taken up into the sky, when the eagle and he took fire together. The interpretation of this dream is easy. When he suddenly wakes in terror he finds himself alone with Virgil in the full sunshine of day, and looking towards the sea—the beautiful valley, the friendly gentle spirits, the softness of the twilight, all having disappeared. Virgil, however, calms his surprise. "Fear not," says his kind guide. "When thy soul slept within thee above the flowers, in the lightness which precedes day, a lady came and said, 'I am Lucia' (the representative of enlightenment and grace, she whom the Queen of heaven sent first to warn Beatrice of the danger of her friend); 'let me take him who sleeps, that the way may be easy to him.'" Accordingly, while Sordello and "the other gentle forms" remain in the soft regions where they dwell, Dante has been carried by this heavenly lady up to the gate of Purgatory, where his leader has followed, and where they now find themselves at last.

When Dante has recovered from his uncertainty and

tremor, he follows his guide towards the cliffs which close in the place of penitence. They come to an opening which looks like a rent in the rock, and there find a door approached by three steps. On these is seated the porter, who takes at first no notice of them. His face shines so that mortal eyes cannot look upon it, and he has a naked sword in his hand which throws back the sun's rays, dazzling the poet. "What would you? where is your escort?" asks this angel; but at the name of that "lady from heaven," changes his tone and invites them to approach. The first step is of pure white marble, so clear that Dante sees himself reflected in it; the second is of dark rock, "darker than perse"—a simile which he has already employed—and cracked across and across; the third is of porphyry, as red as blood. On these steps rested the feet of the angel who sat on the threshold on a great diamond stone; and Dante, led by his master, throws himself at the feet of this guardian, who writes with the blunt end of his sword seven letters on his forehead. "See that these are washed from thee within the gates," he says. The letter is P, and these are symbols of the seven capital sins, from which every soul who reaches heaven has to be cleansed. Then the angel, who is the deputy of St Peter, draws the two keys from under his robe and opens the door. It grates on the hinge, as the Tarpeian rock resounded for the loss of Metellus; but when that thunder is over, the poets hear a great "Te Deum" rolling forth, voices mingled with sweet music—like a choir which chants with the organ, so that sometimes the anthem sounds distinct, and sometimes dies away.

THE REALM OF PENANCE.

The travellers, when they have entered by this door, find themselves in a narrow pass, a fissure of the rock, between two ragged edges, and, climbing painfully, emerge upon a desolate plain, bounded by a high wall of cliff. The cliff is, on the inner side, of the clearest marble, and is covered with beautiful sculpture. There the poet perceives the angel of the Annunciation, "cut in such gentle action you would have sworn he said 'Ave.'" Beyond this (Virgil calls him to note that there are more groups than one, so intent is he upon the first) is the car of the Ark, preceded by a procession separated into seven choirs, which to all Dante's senses seem to answer one another in responsive verse, "as if one said 'No' and the other 'Yes';" while the very eyes and nose seemed to feel the rising of the incense. Before the Ark was represented "the humble Psalmist," dancing as he went; while Michal, sad and disdainful, watched the spectacle from a great palace. Further on is the story of Trajan and the widow: the emperor, surrounded by a crowd of knights, with the golden eagles waving over them, is on a journey, when he is stopped by a widow calling for vengeance on the murderers of her son. Trajan puts her off on the score of the inopportuneness of her request; but she presses, and he stops his journey to right his poor suppliant. This tale would seem to have much impressed the poet, for it is elsewhere referred to. These wonders of art occupy him so much that he as yet observes nothing else till, recalled by Virgil to their principal object, he sees strange shapes creeping along the

ground, which do not seem to him human persons, and of which he can make nothing. These are the proud and arrogant, the same who in Hell were immersed in the dark marsh of Styx, but here are weighed down by the great stones they carry on their backs, which force them downwards with crushing weight till their faces almost touch the pavement. A figure in stone is sometimes made like this, Dante tells us, to support a roof, with its knees crushed close to its breast. From these bowed-down penitents, however, rise with one voice the petitions of the Lord's Prayer, the last of which, entreating safety from temptation, they explain to be for their brethren left behind them on earth, not for themselves. Thus even in their sufferings these Christian souls unite themselves to their kind. "If they thus speak for us," says Dante, "what should not we do and say for them, helping them to wash away their sins by our prayers?" When Virgil begs them to direct him to the easiest way of ascending to the next degree, out of consideration for his companion, who still is weighted with the burden of Adam, a voice rises from the moving mass, though it could not be told from whom. No power have these laden souls to express wonder or gaze at the spectacle of this living man. "If I were not hindered by this which bends down my face, I would look to see if I knew him, and make him pitiful of my sufferings." This is Omberto Aldobrandeschi, of a great Tuscan family, proud by race, and thus expiating his haughtiness on earth. While he speaks, another more eager wrenches himself round beneath his stone so as to see the new-comer, and recognises and calls him. "Oh," cries Dante, "art not thou that Oderisi, the glory of Agubbio, the honour of that

art which is called in Paris illumination?" "Brother, the pages of Franco of Bologna smile now more brightly," says the miniaturist; "the honour is now his, and but partly mine. Oh the vainglory of human things! Cimabue held the field of painting, but now for Giotto is all the cry; and thou hast seen how one Guido took from another the glory of verse—and one perhaps is born who will cast out both." The reference here is to two poets, little known now save as precursors and friends of Dante—which indeed is the sole title by which Oderisi the painter and Casella the musician have kept a place in the recollection of men. Near the painter is another Tuscan, Provenzano Salvani of Sienna. Like oxen moving in the same yoke, Dante was moving on with the spirit of his friend, with bent head and pitiful aspect, when his leader called him to continue his path, and directed his attention to the incised decorations on the pavement, like the stones placed on tombs, but done with finer cut. There Dante reads the story of the proud in all generations from Adam, through a strange mixture of classical and scriptural characters: Nimrod at the foot of his tower, Niobe among her slain children, Saul as he died in Gilboa, Troy in ashes and in ruins. What a master of the chisel was he who designed these groups, at which the most subtle genius might wonder! for the dead in them were dead, and the living alive. So deeply interested is Dante, that his guide has again to call him to perceive a new wonder.

"He who still on all that passèd intent
Preceded me: 'Now raise thy head; to go
Thus musing on the ground with visage bent
Is no more time. An angel coming, lo!

Directs his steps to us, the day's work done;
Sixth servant of the day is he. Be so
That reverence in thy looks and countenance shown,
That he may aid us in our high ascent.
Ne'er can this day, remember, be re-done.'
Well used was I to the admonishment
To lose no time, and to my mind this rule
Was from his lips with clearest meaning sent.
Then onward came that creature beautiful:
Opening his arms and wings with liberal grace,
He said, 'Come! for the steps are near at hand
When lightly ye may mount at easy pace.
Even such assurance calls a scanty band.
O human folk! though born to upward flight,
How small a wind can all your force command!'
Then to the rocky passage, turning light,
With promise of good going and secure,
He brushed my forehead with his pinions bright."

Not knowing the significance of this touch, Dante goes on climbing upwards, as on those stairs which lead to San Miniato, a church on one of the sunny slopes overlooking Florence. As they approach the higher circle they hear voices chanting, "Blessed are the poor in spirit," so sweetly, that the strain seemed beyond the sweetness of human speech: how different from the infernal region, where every new step was greeted by fierce lamentations, as here by songs! "Master," asks Dante, wondering at the lightness with which he himself makes his way upward, "has some burden been lifted from me that I go so easily without weariness?" "When all the marks," says Virgil, "are wiped out from thy forehead, as one has been, the path, instead of being a weariness, will be a delight to you." Perplexed, the poet raises his hand to his forehead, and finds that one of the letters

marked there is gone. Only six are left; and this was why the angelic wing touched him as they parted. "My guide smiled," he says, "looking on." So they reached the second circle.

It must be noted that the circles of Purgatory are not like those of Hell, well-like in form, descending from the centre. They are ledges or cornices round the steep slope of the mountain, with sometimes stairs, sometimes an ascent of broken rock on the hillside, leading from one to another, but all free to the sunshine and air. The background of cliff is not, however, any longer enriched with sculpture, but is left in the grey hue of nature on this second ledge, where they go on for about a mile without seeing any one. In Purgatory, as has been seen, Virgil goes somewhat timidly, inquiring the way, for the country is unknown to him, and it troubles him to meet no one. By-and-by, however, they encounter various wandering spirits, heard but unseen, who breathe past them in the wind, uttering mystic words. "They have no wine," says one, flying past — apparently in reference to the charity of the Virgin at the marriage-feast, in her endeavour to supply the wants of the revellers. Another wandering voice says, "I am Orestes," with less apparent meaning. "What are these, O father?" cried Dante; and as he speaks another breathes past, crying, "Love those who wrong you." The voices go on, and are heard repeating the same cries when they have passed. This is the circle in which the envious are punished; and these flying witnesses for kindness and charity, are at once for their punishment and instruction, as contrasting with their evil, as well as encouraging them in good. Virgil now points out to Dante that a little way in advance of them, in this place

which seems so solitary, there are many persons closely crowded against the wall, in dark dresses like the rock, and at first scarcely distinguishable from it. When the travellers are close enough to see, they find these sufferers to be clothed in sackcloth, leaning back upon the cliff, and supporting themselves each on the shoulder of the other, like needy blind men standing near the confessional, who ask no alms, but stir compassion by the sight of their misery. And this comparison is all the more just that each of them is blinded by a thread of iron through the eyelids, as hawks are blinded when they are being tamed. This pitiful sight moves Dante to the heart. He thinks no man could be so hard-hearted as not to be struck with compassion; and thus to go inspecting these blind people, but unseen by them, seems an outrage upon their suffering. He turns to Virgil with a mute appeal for counsel, and Virgil bids him "Speak," but briefly and to the purpose; upon which he addresses the silent line of bystanders. "O people! safe of seeing the full glory of that light which alone you wish for," he says with courteous art, consoling them in their temporary blindness; and asks his usual question if there are any Latins among them. Then he perceives one of the shades in the distance looking up—that is to say, raising the chin after the manner of the blind—with an air of expectation. This is a lady of Sienna, called Sapia, who describes herself as having been ever "more glad of the afflictions of others than of her own good fortune," though saved at the extremity of life by repentance and the prayers of a holy man. To her question about himself, "Who art thou who inquirest our condition, thyself with eyes unbound?" he

replies that he has sinned but little in this fashion, and would fear more the torment of the proud in the circle below, from whence he has just come; but adds that he is living, to her great wonder. Two other spirits, one leaning against the other, hear what he says, and there is a sense as of eager listening along the silent line as this strange incident occurs. "Ask him to draw nearer; but accost him gently, that he may speak," one says to the other. These are Guido del Duca, who says of himself that "to see a man glad made him livid," the envy in his blood being so bitter; and Rinieri da Calboli, the representative of another noble house. Guido denounces Florence and all the cities about, and mourns the decay of the noble races, and the rise of the upstarts who hold rule in Bologna and Faenza. "Marvel not, Tuscan, if I weep," he cries, "when I remember our companions lost"—

> "The ladies and the noble knights, the toils
> And quiet hours of ease that with them drew
> Fair love and courtesy, where now the wiles
> Of evil hearts abound."

This spirit dismisses the poets hastily, moved by the images of trouble to his country which come before him, so much that he can no longer speak—

> "Go, Tuscan, on thy way; it likes me more
> To weep than speak, so much my heart is rent
> With all our converse brings, and thoughts of yore."

Then the travellers proceed onward without a word, the sound of their steps only announcing to these "dear souls" their sorrowful departure. Other flying voices rush past them as they go on. "Whosoever finds me will slay me," cries one, in the words of Cain. Thus they reach the ascent to the third ledge.

By this time, circling the mountain, they have turned westward, and face the declining sun, for it is now late afternoon, and the light has begun to slant. Dante, however, feels himself struck by a splendour more bright than the sunshine, which dazzles, and makes him bow his head. As he raises his hand to shield his eyes from the brightness, which blinds him like the reflection from water or from a mirror, he asks Virgil what this can be. "Be not astonished," says the gentle guide, "if the family of heaven still dazzle thee. It is a messenger come to invite our ascent;" and immediately the angel calls to them "with a joyful voice," and behind them they hear songs of congratulation—"Blessed are the merciful" and "Happy is he who overcomes." The reader will observe the difference between the friendly and kind accost of the angels here, who point out each new ascent, and the lofty indifference, and almost impatience, of the deliverer who procured their entrance into the city of Dis, but passed them without a word when he had done what he was sent to do. In Purgatory, the angels, though dazzling to mortal eyes, are sweet friends to the ascending spirits. As they go on, a discussion arises upon their last encounter; and while they are talking, Dante suddenly falls into a kind of ecstasy, in which he sees strange visions—the first of which is the Temple at Jerusalem, where stands a woman with "the gentle aspect of a mother," who says, "My son, why hast Thou thus dealt with us? Behold, Thy father and I have sought Thee sorrowing." Then the vision changes, and —another instance of Dante's constant practice of mixing up scriptural with classic subjects—he sees the wife of Pisistratus appealing to her husband for vengeance against

her daughter's lover, and hears the answer, "What shall we do to those who hate us if we condemn those who love us?" Then this scene gives place to the martyrdom of Stephen. These visions pass before his eyes while he goes on, as betwixt sleep and waking. "What ails thee," says Virgil, who has seen him stumbling like a man half asleep, "that thou canst not hold thyself erect?" But we confess ourselves unable to perceive the relation of these three visions to each other, or their application to Dante's circumstances. While he talks of them with his guide, they go on, gazing as far as their eyes will carry into the evening, towards the serene and lucid rays in the west, when suddenly a great cloud of fog or smoke comes towards them and obliterates the light, swallowing them up. The ascent has been so gentle, as the angel promised, that it has not arrested the conversation of the travellers.

The "darkness as of hell," or as of "a night deprived of every star," which thus suddenly comes upon them, and which takes all power of independent movement from Dante, who clutches at the shoulder of his faithful escort, is the place of punishment for anger. In the dark, the travellers hear voices praying round them, beginning all their appeals with the "Agnus Dei," with a pathetic yet almost humorous mixture of inappropriateness, such as goes through much of this portion of the book; for what could be more unlikely, yet more befitting, than that the violent and fierce of earth should throw themselves on the gentlest of all divine symbols, the Lamb of God? "Master, who are these spirits?" says Dante, holding close to his leader in the darkness. "And who art thou?" asks a voice when Virgil has ex-

plained, "who talk'st of us as if thou wert still among those who measure time by calends." "O being! who purifiest thyself to stand beautiful before Him who made thee!" says Dante, with the same graceful courtesy as before, in the midst of this infernal cloud. It is Marco Lombardo who thus addresses him in the darkness, but no particulars of his life or character are given; and the two, unseen by each other in the midst of the gloom, fall to solemn talk of those subjects which, in all times and places, are so entrancing to thoughtful men —the everlasting problems of necessity and free-will. Marco argues long and ably in support of free-will, first "giving forth a deep sigh from the grief that was in him." In this argument occurs the following beautiful description of the new-created soul:—

"Issuing from His great hand who loves her, ere
She is: in gentle form that childhood shows,
That weeps, and laughs, and gambols, gay and fair,
Comes forth the simple soul: that nothing knows
Save that, her Maker being glad, so she,
Glad too, most gladly to all pleasure goes.
And first some small delight she finds to be
Delightful; then, deceived, too eager flies
To that, if of all curb and guidance free;
In which the need of law, restraining, lies."

The same speaker expresses his opinion of the temporal power of the Pope, in a way which would be little satisfactory to the Vatican. Dante's opinions on this point are very uncompromising, and expressed with his usual boldness. In the "Inferno," the reader will remember he anathematises the fatal gift of wealth given by Constantine to the Church, and here he is still more distinct in his strictures:—

"Rome, which renewed the world, was wont of yore
To have two suns, of different pathways lord,
One God revealed, one earth enlightened o'er.
But one the other quenched—joining the sword
To th' pastoral crook; which may together ne'er
In living force combine in act or word,
Since joined, one of the other has no fear.

. . . . . .

Thus we to-day behold the Church of Rome;
By joining in herself two several rules,
Fallen in the mud, to harm and evil come."

"Oh, my Marco! thy argument is good; and now I see why the sons of Levi had no inheritance," says Dante. The interview terminates abruptly when Marco sees a faint whiteness penetrate the gloom. "God be with you," he says, "I cannot come further; the angel is here,"—for Marco, though so sound in his argument, is not yet sufficiently cleansed from sin to encounter the angel who joyfully furthers each cleansed sinner on his way. "Think, reader," cries the poet, "if ever a fog has overtaken you in the Alps, making your eyesight like that of a mole, when the vapours began to clear away, how at first the round sphere of the sun looked wan and sickly through them." Thus the two poets came forth confused into the light, and saw the sun hanging low over his couch in the west. Here once more imagination seized upon Dante, and it is a curious instance of the shadowy and less real character of the purgatorial scenes, that he is constantly falling into these momentary trances or waking dreams, aiding what he is supposed to see, with what passes before him in fantastic vision. As he moves towards the end of this circle of wrath, he dreams of the hanging of Haman, and thinks

he hears the wail of Lavinia, the daughter of the Latin king, over the suicide of her mother—two incidents that seem at first to have but a very far-off connection with the subject. All this world of remedial punishment is dim. It has neither the deep and burning reality of Hell, nor that hopeful freshness and sweetness which marked the first change to the regions of hope. Even the angel who next meets them, and points out unsolicited the next ascent, is but a beautiful vision of light indistinguishable. It is his shining which wakes Dante from his dream—"as a new light striking suddenly upon the closed countenance breaks sleep, which trembles, wavering before it dies." But when the poet turns towards this glory which has roused him, he sees only a dazzling as of the sun, veiled in his own rays. "This divine spirit," says Virgil, "conceals himself in light;" and even the needful touch which clears off another of the letters of guilt from Dante's forehead is again done by something "like the movement of a wing," which gently fans his face as he goes on, hearing again behind him another beatitude—the soft chant of heavenly congratulation, "Blessed are the peacemakers," as he progresses to the next round.

In this fourth circle, Virgil explains, it is those who have been guilty of *accidia*—an Italian word for which we have no fit synonym—lukewarmness in piety, and sloth in duty, who are punished; and he enters upon a long description of love, which is too mystic and philosophical for these pages. Beneath them in the three circles below have been punished three breaches of love—the pride which desires pre-eminence over others, the envy which grudges others' good, the rage which seeks revenge.

In the three circles above is punished the misplaced love which seeks its happiness in carnal things; and midway comes this penance of the lukewarm, the sin of love defective or unfulfilled. All this is too philosophical for the ordinary ear, and has little hold upon the heart. In the circle itself, when, after Virgil's long discourse, lengthened by another upon the nature of love, they enter it, they are met by a crowd of breathless spirits rushing past to do with vehemence of haste that which they were so slow to do on earth, whose sudden rush wakes Dante from a kind of thoughtful slumberousness which has again come upon him. It is now midnight, and the waning moon, just risen, dims all the stars, and shows a great dilated broken circle all on fire. The spirits come like a whirlwind from behind the travellers, rushing on with cries of haste: "Quick! quick! that the time may not be lost," they shout, reminding each other how Mary hurried to the hill-country, and Cæsar rushed to Spain to the conquest of Ilerda—two examples most strangely combined. When Virgil, as usual, asks the way, a spirit, courteous but breathless, asking pardon for the seeming rudeness, which is duty, and describing himself as the Abbot of San Zeno, bids them follow, and they will find the opening. Two still more notable examples of sloth, chosen in the same way from the Hebrew and the classic world—the Jews who permitted themselves to die before they saw Jordan, and the Trojans who had not heart to endure to the end with Æneas—fill up the confusion and haste of this circle of the sluggard. As they emerge from it, Dante falls into another mysterious dream, in which the Syren appears, and a second symbolical lady, but of which very little is to be made.

This time we may suppose that the poet has slept, for Virgil rouses him with a half-complaint—"At least three times have I called thee;" and when he looks up, the circle of the sacred mount is full of high day.

It is perhaps a sign that we are again approaching more solid soil that Dante can see the angel who calls to them, "Here is the opening," with voice so benign and sweet as never is heard in mortal land. With great wings spread, which are like the wings of a swan, he stands between the two walls which mark the way, making, with the movement of his lovely plumes, a gentle air which fans them, and saying with his own celestial voice the next beatitude, the "Blessed are those who mourn," which it is to be supposed the hurrying crowd below have no time or breath to utter. When Virgil has again with timely prick of reproof roused his charge from brooding over his dream, they go on rounding this fifth circle; and here they find a company lying prostrate on the ground, saying, "My soul cleaves to the dust," with such profound sighing, that the words can hardly be distinguished. While Virgil, as usual, asks the way, Dante, with a look, begs his permission to speak to one of these weeping spirits. This turns out to be the soul of Pope Adrian V., who held the Holy See for a month only, and who thus replies to Dante's question:—

"'I was converted; but, alas! full late.
When I the pastor of great Rome became,
The lying shows of life that mighty state
Disclosed; for to the heart no quiet came,
And mortal rank no higher place could show—
Whence love of this life woke with sudden flame.
Up to that moment, miserable, low,

Parted from God, a miser I had been;
Which here thou seest I expiate in woe.
And, lo! what avarice is may well be seen,
When even converted souls such misery bear:
Upon this mountain is no pang more keen.
For as our eyes, on earth, were lifted ne'er
On high, but ever fixed on earthly good;
So justice, on the ground has turned them here.
And as our avarice every gift withstood,
Binding love in us no good work to do;
So justice, in its straitest bonds subdued,
Now holds us, hand and foot, in fetters due;
And till the just God's anger shall be stayed,
Thus, motionless, outstretched, our sins we rue.'
Then knelt I down, and something would have said,
But he, perceiving ere that I began
Listening, that I would fain have reverence made,
'Why kneelest thou?' he said; 'what reason can
Move thee to this?' Then said I, 'Your high state,
And seeing humbled thus so great a man.
'Brother,' he answered, 'rise, and err not; great
Would be the wrong; for I with thee, and all,
Serve humbly the almighty potentate.'"

With these words the good Pope dismisses him—"Go, my weeping is disturbed while thou standest there." And he does not even, like so many of the sufferers, ask for his prayers, or for those of his own kinswoman, Alagia, whom he names, but is eager to be left alone to his weeping. Dante goes on, unwillingly, with many other questions to ask, yet reflecting that when one will strives against another, it is labour lost.

After this encounter, they thread their way with difficulty through the motionless shades that cover the ledge, "letting fall, drop by drop, from their eyes," their sin. Here one spirit among the rest is heard, at intervals,

uttering loud exclamations. "O gentle Mary, how poor wast thou, within thy humble lodging at Bethlehem!" he cries; "O good Fabrizio, who preferred poverty to sin!"—balancing thus, according to Dante's invariable practice, the Christian with the classic example. This turns out to be Hugh Capet, the father of the French kings, who discourses to the poets upon his descendants and their qualities, in a manner sufficiently obscure now to the general reader. Charles of Anjou, one of these descendants, was at that time mixed up in Florentine history, to Dante's cost and harm; and it is impossible not to see something of the exile's bitterness in the vehement scorn with which Capet describes this Charles, who, "bearing no arms but that lance" (of treachery) "with which Judas tilted," comes out of France, "to make himself and his people better known." The father of "the Philips and Lewises" does not spare his children. When they have passed this energetic shade, there is a sudden commotion. The entire mountain shakes; and suddenly, with one voice, with a force which startles even Virgil, the spirits from all quarters pour forth a "Gloria in Excelsis." "We stood motionless, hanging on the words, like the shepherds who first heard that song," says Dante; then, there being no one to explain what it meant, "resumed the holy way." As they go on, however, unsatisfied and curious, another incident happens. A shadow appears coming after them, looking at the crowd which lies motionless and unobservant at their feet, and unperceived by the poets until he greets them with courteous voice, as he overtakes them, saying, "Brethren, God give you peace." As the penitents are all confined to their respective circles, like the sinners in

Hell, they have either been stationary hitherto, or accompanied the travellers only a very little way. The newcomer, however, goes on with them, and Virgil informs him of their condition—one a living man, another from the guiltless circle of those without hope—and the object of their journey: and asks what was the meaning of the tremor and shout. The stranger explains that neither earthquake nor storm ever reaches the mountain; but that when a spirit finds itself sufficiently purified to move heavenward, all Purgatory trembles with joy and acclamation. "The will to move proves the worthiness," he says, finely; "for all are free from the first; but, by the ordinance of heaven, they are—till purified—as eager for the torment as once they were for the sin." He himself is the liberated spirit on whose account all his brethren have rejoiced; and he is now on his way to everlasting happiness, after having lain five hundred years in penance. Virgil asks who he is, and the joyful traveller announces himself as Statius, the poet, counted worthy, for the sweetness of his verse, to have his temples crowned with myrtle. "I sang of Thebes, and of the great Achilles," he says, "lit by the sparks of that divine flame which has illuminated so many. I speak of the 'Æneid,' which was my mother and nurse in poetry. Ah, but to have lived when Virgil lived, I would have willingly suffered another year of punishment!"

"At these words, Virgil turned to me his face,
Silent, in silence saying, 'Speak not!' yet
Less strong than he had willed to be—such trace
Of laughter and of tears were thereon set
As show the movements of a soul sincere
More swiftly than it wills. And I, who met
His glance with sign of understanding, here

Smiled also. Then the shadow paused, and bent
His gaze upon my eyes, where shows most clear
The hidden meaning. 'So all good be sent
To crown thy labours: tell me why the light
Of laughter crossed thy countenance intent?'
Now was I, 'twixt the two, in evil plight,—
One bidding silence, one conjuring speech,—
At which I sighed; and I was heard aright.
'Speak thou,' my Master said, 'if he beseech;
Speak without fear, and answer what he would.'
'Thou wonderest, but more wonder still will reach,
O ancient soul!' I said, 'when understood
My smiling is: he who stands here, and guides
My steps on high, is Virgil—in whose good
And noble song the inspiration bides
That taught thee well to sing of gods and men:
Think not my smile another meaning hides.
This is the truth set forth within thy ken.'
Already bent, he would embrace the feet
Of my dear guide, who, 'Brother,' answered then,
'Do it not! thou, a shadow, mayst not greet
A shadow thus.' Then rose he up, and cried,
'Couldst thou but know what warmth of loving, fleet,
Drives recollection forth of all beside!"

This delightful encounter makes Dante almost forgetful of the fifth angel, who erases from his brow another letter: and breaks to his ear the song of ascending beatitude—"Blessed are those who thirst" for righteousness —of which he only hears these beginning words; but more and more lightly he feels himself to go onward, relieved of burden after burden. Then, as they pass on, now a party of three, Virgil questions Statius how it was possible that avarice could gain possession of such a mind as his; to which Statius replies, with a smile, that not avarice, but prodigality, was his sin. The reader

will remember that these two vices are punished together in the Inferno. Statius then explains, in answer to Virgil's further question, how he, first moved to religion as well as to poetry by his predecessor's verse, sought in secret the preachers of the new sect and was baptised. Then, in his turn, he inquires after the other great poets of antiquity—"our old Terence," Plautus and Varro, and Persius; and the two Latins pursue their conversation about ancient friends, and the poetry which is their common art—to which Dante, following alone, listens intent, feeling himself more and more capable of verse.

This "sweet talk" is interrupted by the sight of a beautiful tree standing in the midst of the path, laden with fair and fragrant fruit, which spreads outward at the top, but beneath is so bare of branches that no one might climb it. On one side, a crystal stream waters it, falling sparkling upon the leaves. As the poets approach, voices come from among the branches, like songs of birds, proclaiming the advantages of temperance; and soon a band of lean and attenuated pilgrims come up, pinched as if by famine — among whom is one who eagerly addresses Dante, and who turns out to be Forese Donati, a relative of Gemma, Dante's wife, and friend of his youth. Forese explains that this beautiful tree is the chief instrument of punishment to the starving gluttons who suffer in this circle, tempting them with its fragrant apples to eat and drink, with constantly renewed pain, for the fruit is beyond their reach, and they are obliged to pass it again and again in their march round. Why Forese, so high up on the purgatorial hill, and so fully occupied by the punishment he had himself to suffer, should fall into a sudden onslaught upon the

luxurious and immodest dress of the Florentine women, it is strange to tell. But so he does, having first praised his own little widow, his Nella, whose prayers have helped him so far on his way. Dante then inquires where Piccarda is now, the sister of Forese (whom he afterwards encounters in Paradise), and asks if any others are here, among these shrunken and hollow-eyed ghosts, whom he knows. Many are mentioned to him by name, who seem to take pleasure in seeing him; but, most of all, one Buonagiunta of Lucca, who speaks, murmuring in his throat, something about Gentucca,—then explains that there is born in his city a young creature, not yet wearing the veil of full-grown womanhood, who will make it delightful to the poet; and asks if it is indeed the author of the song, "Ladies who have intelligence in love," whom he sees. "Count me as one who is the scribe of Love," says Dante, with fine modesty; "according as he has spoken within me, so I write." The spirits in punishment are now obliged to hurry on upon their round; and the three travellers proceed forward alone, passing another beautiful tree, which is surrounded by a crowd of hungry supplicants, holding up their hands, like children, for the fruit which hangs out of their reach: a simple vice simply punished, the reader will feel, though it is evident that it bulked more largely in Dante's eyes. As they go on, silent and contemplative, a sudden voice startles them, making the mortal among them tremble. "Why go ye three alone so pensively?" cries the voice. "If you will ascend the mountain, here is the place." Never was metal in the furnace more clear in glowing colour than the figure which Dante perceived when he raised his head.

"And as when, herald of the dawn, the air
Of genial May first wakens fresh and sweet
With scent of growing grass and blossoms fair;
So felt I, soft, a gentle wind that beat
My brow—and felt the movement of the wing
Shed through the air ambrosial odours sweet:
And heard these words, 'Blessed are they who bring
Such grace with them that appetite ne'er strays,
Nor longs their bosom for forbidden thing.'"

The next canto is full of a conversation with Statius, in which Dante asks how the shadows who require no nourishment should grow lean, as has been apparent to him in the circle of the gluttons. To explain this, the elder poet describes first how the mortal frame is compounded; and then how after death, memory, intelligence, and will, becoming more acute than ever, so tinge the atmosphere around them with their own life, that as the air in rainy weather reflects all the heavenly colours, so the air around these living principles takes apparent shape and form, and becoming thus a semblance of the original body, is called a shadow, and is endowed with all the human faculties. "Hence we speak, we laugh, we are capable of sighs and tears, as you have heard on the mountain," the shadow ever following and representing the variations of feeling in the mind. It seems late, however, to ask this information, on the verge of the last circle of punishment, after all that we have seen endured and done by shadows through the two spheres of Hell and Purgatory.

The last circle of all is that in which those souls are punished who have sinned through carnal love: where we find again a glowing circle of familiar fire, in which the sufferers burn, but sing, proclaiming out of the flames the

praises of the chaste. Here Dante meets with a poet to whom he shows almost as much affectionate devotion as Statius had shown to Virgil. This is Guido Guinicelli, one of the Guidos already mentioned, whom Dante calls "my father, and the father of those my brothers who have woven the sweet and lightsome rhymes of love;" and he hastens to offer himself as "all ready for the service" of the other poet, "with that affirmation which makes men to be believed by their fellows." "Why in speech and looks do you show so much love for me?" asks Guinicelli, surprised. It is "for your sweet sayings, which make dear the very ink that wrote them," cries Dante, with fervour. "O brother!" says the other, pointing to a spirit before him, "there is one who was a better maker in his maternal speech. In rhymes of love and in romances he excels all." Dante then speaks to this second spirit, Arnault Daniel, a Provençal poet, who answers him in the "maternal language" which Guinicelli has referred to. "I am Arnault who weep and go singing," says the old troubadour; and both these spirits recommend themselves to his prayers. "Say a Paternoster for me, if thou art privileged to enter that cloister where Christ is the abbot of the college," says one; and "Remember my pain when thou art at the head of the great stair," adds the other, in antique southern French. He it is who first framed the story of Lancelot of the Lake; so that we too, as well as Dante, have to do with the Provençal. And now Dante himself is subjected to a strange and unexpected trial, to which his courage is scarcely equal. The angel standing on the edge of the flame, who sings "Blessed are the pure in heart" with a voice more sweet than any human voice, stops them as

they approach. "Go no further, holy spirits," he cries, "till the fire pierce you. Enter in, and be not deaf to the songs you hear." Dante at this terrible command becomes as one dead. Visions rush into his mind of flesh and blood consumed by flames, and he stands incapable of movement. Virgil hastens to him with anxious encouragements. "Here you may be tormented, my son, but not slain," he cries. "Bethink thee, bethink thee! Did I not guide thee safe even on Geryon? and what can happen to thee now so much nearer God? Put away, put away every fear." "But I stood still," says Dante, "though against my conscience." Then Virgil, disturbed by this panic, uses the final argument. "Son," he says, "see now, between Beatrice and thee stands this wall alone." At these words Dante's terror yields; and Virgil, shaking his head with paternal smile as at a child, goes before him into the flames. The heat was so intense that molten glass would have been cool in comparison; but, to keep up the courage of his pupil, the kind Virgil continues to talk of Beatrice. "Already I see her eyes," he says. Their course is guided through the fire by a voice on the other side which sings, "Come, ye blessed of my Father!" close to which they issue out of the flames. This voice is enveloped in a light so radiant that Dante's eyes cannot support it. "The sun is sinking, the evening comes," it adds: "hasten your steps before the west grow dark;" and thus dismissed, they enter upon the final ascent. But half-way up weariness overtakes them, and, lying down each upon a step of the stair, they rest, while darkness steals over the mystic world—as the goats lie silent in the shade at noon, while the goatherd watches leaning on his staff; and as the shepherd is vigilant over

his flock through the still night lest wild beasts molest them,—" such were we then," says Dante; " I the flock, they the shepherds." Lying thus upon the stair, little could be seen of the sky, but yet in that little the stars were visible, clearer and greater than their wont; and gazing up at them from within those walls of rock, musing and wondering at their beauty, the poet fell asleep. Long after him, in a far homelier strain, did not Wordsworth sing of " the little span of sky, and little lot of stars," under which each little hamlet lay quiet and slept? So Dante slept after his long toil, after the flames that had confirmed and ended the experiences of his great journey, and dreamed of Leah gathering flowers to make herself beautiful like Rachel. When he awoke it was broad day.

And now Dante is on the eve of a more important change. " To-day shall thy hunger be satisfied," says Virgil, as they continue their ascent. And when they reach the top, fixing his eyes upon his charge, he tenderly dismisses him. " Thou hast seen the eternal fire, and that which is but for a time; now thou art arrived where I can go no further," he says. " I have led thee with genius and skill; take now thy own will for thy guide. Before thee the sun shines, the flowers bloom, and there are grass and trees. While the beautiful eyes that wept and sent me to thee come hither in gladness, wait here, or go on as thou wilt. Attend no longer my direction. Be free, be wise; a sin it were not to use thy own judgment now."

With these words Virgil gives up his charge, and, no longer the leader, follows Dante into the flowery plain of the Earthly Paradise.

THE EARTHLY PARADISE.

The poets have now passed beyond those regions over which sin and sorrow hold sway; and it is into the stillness as of a summer morning, fresh and breathing a thousand sweetnesses, yet somewhat languid as if the night had been one of storm and trouble, that we now come forth. The way lies through a wood which tempers the sunshine with its greenness, and a soft air breathes, which touches the forehead, no longer like a blow, but like a caress. The leaves, swaying with the soft wind, add a hum and murmur of accompaniment to the song of the birds, like that which breathes through the Pineta when Eolus lets loose the scirocco. Wandering onward through these delights, all charmed and stilled by the beauty and the quiet, the poets come to the edge of a little stream. All the rivers of earth would seem dark and muddy beside its crystal clearness, although the perpetual shadow of the trees hangs over it, shutting out both sun and moon. Resting by the banks of this brook, but travelling beyond it with his eyes, Dante admires the varieties of beautiful growth about; and perceives suddenly, "like a thing which for wonder of it drives all other thoughts away," a lady who strays alone along the bank, singing and gathering the flowers with which the path is painted. "Ah, beautiful lady!" cries Dante, "sunning thyself in the rays of love, may it please thee to draw near this streamlet, that I may hear thy song, which puts me in mind of Proserpine, whose mother lost her, and who lost the spring?" As softly turns a lady in the dance, scarce putting foot before foot,

so turned this fair wanderer upon the flowers, with gentle eyes cast down, and approached so near that the sweet sound of her singing could be understood. When she had reached the brink where the water bathed the grass, she raised upon him eyes so full of light that those of Venus could not shine more sweet, and stood smiling on the other bank, with her hand full of the lovely colours of the flowers. The little stream, however, was as Hellespont to the poet, who, though it was but three paces broad, could not cross; for this is the wonderful stream of Lethe, which he is not yet permitted to taste. The lady, whose name is Matilda, describes to him across the brook the nature of the place, which is holy ground. "Here the human race was innocent," she says; "here it is ever spring." The elder poets smile as she speaks; and she, "singing like a lady who loves," resumes the song which Dante was before so eager to hear, and which now comes clearly to his ear in the words of the Psalm, "Blessed are they whose sins are covered." Then she goes on along the course of the stream with maidenly step, while Dante on the opposite side follows, keeping up with her. Suddenly she turns to him and cries, "Look, brother! look and listen!" and he perceives a mysterious light which illuminates all the forest, and hears a soft melody flowing through the luminous air, which moves him first of all to blame in his heart the hardihood of Eve, whose sins prevented him and all her children from enjoying the sacred beauty of this place. Then, as he approaches nearer, he sees what seem seven trees of gold, but are in reality seven golden candlesticks; and in the singing which resounds softly from under them he distinguishes the word "Hosanna." Turning with wondering delight

to consult Virgil by a look, he finds the good Virgil not less wondering than himself. This apparition moved towards the poets so slowly that a bride on her wedding-day would have gone faster. Behind came a great company clothed in robes of such whiteness that nothing on earth was ever like them. Dante stands close upon the margin on one side, while on the other this procession passes along, the lights first, like banners, leaving a trail of glory through the air, in all the rainbow colours, with the four-and-twenty elders crowned with lilies, and the four living creatures of Ezekiel, following after them. These latter are crowned with green leaves, and their wings are full of eyes. In the middle of these mystic forms comes a triumphal car, drawn by a Gryphon. At the right wheel are three nymphs dancing onwards—these are supposed to be Faith, Hope, and Charity; while, on the other hand, are four kindred figures representing the four moral virtues, with Prudence at their head; then come a group of venerable men. The whole strange procession halted opposite Dante upon the other bank of the stream. There they sang, invoking some more sacred presence. "Come thou from Lebanon, my sister, my spouse!" and "Blessed art thou who comest!" they sang, throwing a shower of beautiful flowers around the mystic car. Then follows a fine description of the loss of one beloved guide and the arrival of another:—

"As I have seen in dawning of the day
The rosy orient and the blue serene
Of the surrounding skies, and rising ray
Of the great sun, all tempered in their sheen
By vapours and soft clouds, that so the eye
Might long endure their glowing splendour: seen
Thus 'mid a cloud of flowers, thrown up on high

From those angelic hands, and dropping down
In showers of bloom within, without; so I,
Under a snowy veil and olive crown,
Saw now a lady with a mantle green,
And shining like the living flame her gown,—
At which my spirit, that so long had been
Thrilled by no tremor from her presence fair,
While yet the eyes discerned her not, though seen—
Felt, even though undiscerned, some spell was there
Which potency of ancient love renewed,
Soon as my heart was touched by movement rare
Of that high virtue which had deep imbued
And pierced my soul while yet in childhood's band.
I turned me swift to my left side, as would
A child in fear or trouble, to the hand
Where stood the mother, rushing to her breast—
To say to Virgil, 'Nothing can command
My heart to still its throbbing; thus confest,
I feel the burning of the ancient fire.'
But Virgil, lo! to whom my heart addrest
Its inmost sighs—Virgil, the dearest sire—
Virgil, to whom I gave me up—had stole
Himself from me. Nor wonder, nor desire,
Of all that our first mother lost, my soul
Could comfort for this loss, or dry the dew
That wet my cheeks for such unthought-of dole."

The veiled lady on the chariot stays this outburst of natural emotion. She bids him weep not for Virgil, since in himself he has greater occasion for tears. "Look at me well," she says, from the height of the triumphal car, with a royal aspect and majestic air of reproof; "for truly I am—I am Beatrice,"—and upbraids him that he has been so long of seeking the better way. Dante's conscience so seconds this reproof, that he casts down his eyes; but seeing himself in the clear stream, hastily withdraws them to the grass, such shame is on his forehead.

As an offending child to the mother who towers grandly over him, he stands abashed, not daring to look up: but, melted in his sorrow by the sudden, sweet, consolatory song of the surrounding angels, "In Thee, O Lord, is my hope!" breaks forth into sighing and tears, more touched than if they had absolutely interceded for him. Beatrice, however, continues her lofty reproof, speaking to the celestial spectators, and not directly to the culprit, and describing how great had been the promise of his youth, and how her own influence had led him; but how, fallen from his good beginning, he had wandered so far, that no way of salvation remained for him except to show him the sufferings of the lost—and for this purpose she had herself gone among the dead to select a fit guide for him. But it would be a breach of God's high laws if all this should be done for him, and the waters of Lethe allowed to wash away all recollection of his sins, without some tears of penitence from himself. "Is it not so?" she says, turning suddenly to him, while he stands abashed, yet feeling her reproach somewhat harsh, so long as it is indirect. When she thus appeals to himself, however, he is struck to the heart. "Confusion and pain so mingled together, drew from my mouth a trembling Yes," says the poet. Then, altogether broken down, he attempted a faltering defence. "When thy face was hidden from me, the things of the moment and false pleasures led my steps astray." The trial is bitter. All Dante's personal purgatory is concentrated in this hour of meeting, to which he had so long looked forward. He has been thinking of himself as the favourite of heaven, beloved by Beatrice. And he is proportionately crushed by this severe reproof. "After knowing me, how couldst

thou stoop to lighter loves?" she asks, almost in the words which a poet of our own day has employed. As she thus spoke, the compassionate angels ceased the shower of flowers which had partially veiled her from Dante's sight; and suddenly recognising Beatrice in all her worshipful beauty, more lovely and worshipful than ever, he is struck with horror at the thought of those lesser things which he had substituted for her, and so falls prostrate on the ground, overcome with shame and sorrow and remorseful love.

When the poet comes to himself, he is in the soft waters of Lethe—waters of oblivion that take away even the memory of sin. "Wash me thoroughly," is the song he hears, as he is drawn through the pure stream by the beautiful lady, Matilda, whom he first saw there. When he has been fully immersed in it, he is brought into the circle of the four nymphs, who in their turn present him to Beatrice. "Turn thy looks upon thy faithful one," they sing. "O Beatrice! turn to him who has come so far to see thee; reveal to him thy second beauty." But what words can say what he saw when she unveiled herself? Hungry with the fast of ten years (for it is so long since she died), all his being is rapt in that gaze, and in contemplation of the "holy smile" again visible on her lips. The angels warn him, "Too much," as he stands gazing; and then the brilliant procession passes on. After a few steps have been made, Beatrice descends from the car, which is then bound to a mystic tree. At this point, suddenly overwhelmed by emotion, splendour, and wonder, Dante drops asleep, he knows not how; and, on waking, finds Beatrice seated under a tree, and is the witness of an extraordinary mystical assault by

various animals upon the empty chariot, which is supposed to mean either the Church or the Holy See. We will not attempt to enter into the discussion of this allegory, any more than we have attempted to interest the reader in the Gryphon who drew the car, or the attendant old men and dancing nymphs. Those who wish to fathom these solemn riddles will find many commentators ready to help them. And, indeed, the greater part of the last canto of the "Purgatory" is filled by Beatrice herself with an exposition of these wonders, not much more clear than the marvels themselves. Finally, Dante is led to the river Eunoe, a continuation of Lethe, but more sweet and delightful than anything known on earth, being, in fact, the nectar of classic fable. Matilda, the guardian of the earthly paradise, is again the minister of this last supreme refreshment and sustenance. Statius, it must be remembered, has still continued with Dante, being on his way to his final resting-place in Heaven, when Matilda, by command of Beatrice, leads the poet towards the holy river.

"The lovely lady turned, as forth she led
My steps, and with such lovely courtesy
As ladies use, to Statius looked, and said,
'Come thou with him.' If longer were my lay,
O reader! something of that draught's delight,
More sweet than words can tell, my song might say.
But full the pages now whereon I write
My second canticle, in ordered tone;
Nor can my art permit a further flight.
From that most holy wave I came like one
Re-made, like a new plant springing on high,
With new leaves, all renewed, a fragrant crown,
Ready to mount towards the stars and sky."

CHAPTER V.

THE 'DIVINE COMEDY:' "PARADISE."

THE LOWER HEAVENS.

PURGATORY ends at the highest point to which earthly blessedness can reach. The soft beatific atmosphere of that Christian Elysium, full of sunshine yet tempered with sweet winds; the crystal purity of the stream which has such wonderful qualities; the flowers more bright and sweet than ever flowers were; the shade of the delightful woods; the freshness and stillness and repose of this Eden, where men were once innocent, — cannot be enhanced by any further touch. And the mood in which Dante reaches the Earthly Paradise, worn with his toilsome and terrible journey, exhausted by emotion and sympathetic pain, with the languor of relief and happiness through all his being, yet full of a subdued eagerness of expectation which points to some crown of delight yet unattained —is a perfect picture of the highest good which human flesh and blood can reach to. But when we take the first step beyond this, which leads us into a higher, ineffable world, we feel at once the wonderful difference. Up to this moment humanity, with its familiar ex-

periences, has been with us everywhere, and we have kept hold of all the natural links of connection with the "clear world," the abode of man. Even in the highest circles of Purgatory a longing towards home and friends — a desire of recollection and love, and of the prayers of those they have left behind—is in the hearts of the hopeful penitents; but a different sentiment pervades the final world of light, in which no traveller had ever preceded Dante to provide any itinerary of the blessed way. Not knowing what he is to see, or what encounter, with his eyes turned in absolute trust upon his heavenly guide, whose face is heaven to him, the poet rises upward, unfamiliar with that strange mode of travel, and wondering at himself. Here are no more backward glances towards the earth, but everything tends upwards—the awed and solemn gaze, the aspiring mind. "Help me, O High Apollo!" cries the poet, with his invariable mingling of classic imagery, though it is in order to celebrate "the glory of Him who moves all" that he invokes the god of song.

The first step out of the Earthly Paradise is into a sphere of light, in which nothing but brightness comes within the power of description. It is a kind of celestial antipodes of the earth—the day and night of this upper region being exactly the contrary of day and night in the world, and the light doubly brilliant, as if a second sun had been added to the first, and all the glories of the day doubled. Strengthened by the example and power derived from Beatrice, who fixes her eyes like an eagle upon the sun, Dante finds that he too can look, though but for a moment, into the centre of light, in which he sees a shimmer of rising sparks, as from an iron out of

the furnace, throwing out a glow of living fire. But his eye cannot long endure this intense radiance, and while Beatrice continues to gaze upon the "eternal wheels" of light, Dante fixes his look upon her, and thus is transformed into her likeness, as Glaucus was transformed into the image of the sea-gods. The whole atmosphere about them is full and brimming with light—fuller than ever was lake when fed by tributary streams and swollen with rain. Dante, confused by this glow of brightness, falls at last into an expression of simple surprise, how he himself, in solid flesh, can rise through the air, while lighter bodies remain stationary. Beatrice replies to him with the close and mystic reasoning which distinguishes her, but with a very human sigh of impatience at his dulness of perception, turning her eyes upon him, "as a mother does when her son raves." The explanation which she gives is in itself mysterious enough. All things, she tells him, are moved by a divine law of order, each class of existence having in itself the impulse which binds it to its individual goal. In the highest heaven is the ultimate calm to which all tends; and as it has been predestined that Dante should make this pilgrimage, the wonder would be, not that he should rise as he is doing, but if he could remain below. Having concluded this exposition, "she turned her face again towards heaven."

"Oh ye who follow in little skiffs behind my bark as it goes singing, turn back," cries Dante, "to your coasts; for never has sail flown across the water which I now take—Minerva inspiring, Apollo guiding, and new Muses revealing Ursa to my sight." Thus the celestial journey begins. The travellers pass through the light like an arrow from the bow, and the poet finds himself in a new sphere,

where "wonderful things" call his gaze to them, withdrawing his eyes for the time even from Beatrice. She, from whom no thought of his is hid, sees his new wonder, and, turning to him, bids him thank God that he has arrived in the first star. It appeared to Dante as if a cloud, "lucid, white, and pure, like adamant struck by the sun," covered him; and into this "eternal pearl" he and his guide enter, as a ray of light enters into water without disturbing the unity of the wave. This pearl, in its solid whiteness, the "first star," is the moon. It seems scarcely consistent with the awe and wonder of the ascent that his first idea should be to consult Beatrice about the lunar spots which have called forth "such fables about Cain in the world below."[1] In the explanation given by Beatrice, however, the whole astronomical system by which the celestial journey is regulated is set forth. The lower heavens, with which it begins, are seven in number—Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, the Sun, Venus, Mercury, and the Moon—the latter being the first step, the beginning of Paradise. Above Saturn come the fixed stars; and the motionless empyrean, "the heaven of divine peace," within which is the fountain of energy and movement—the "primo mobile"—crowns the whole. Dante receives the explanation of his guide, "the sun who first warmed my bosom with love, and now revealed to me the sweet aspect of beautiful truth," with reverential conviction, and raises his head to acknowledge himself "corrected and certain," when a vision appears to him, which so

[1] The idea of the "Man in the Moon," with his thorn-bush, seems a popular twist of the legend that Cain threw a faggot of thorns across the moon to obscure her light, and thus conceal the murder of his brother.

fixes his attention that he forgets to speak. Like the reflection of a man's face in clear water, coming out faint but distinct, as a pearl shows upon a white forehead, he suddenly becomes conscious of many faces in the whiteness round him ready to speak; so that he falls into the contrary error from that which woke love between the man and the fountain—the error of Narcissus—thinking these faces to be shadows which were real persons. Turning quickly to look for the real people of whom he supposes these to be reflections, he sees nothing, and turns for an explanation to "the light of the sweet guide," who, smiling, shone upon him with her holy eyes. She assures him that what he sees are true spirits, not reflections, and bids him speak with them:—

"Then turned I to the shadow which appeared
Most ready to discourse, and thus began,
As one of too much eagerness afeard:
'O well-created soul! whose being can
Feel the full sweetness of eternal rays,
Which he who tastes sole knows of any man,
Most gracious wert thou if thy earthly ways,
And name and state, thou wouldst to me reveal.'
She, prompt, with smiling eyes, her answer says:
'Our goodwill never any door will seal
To just desire, save as He does whose aim
Is still that all His court like Him should feel.
A cloistered sister in the world, my name,
If with thy mind thou wilt regard me well,
Not hid by this new beauty's higher claim,
To be Piccarda, may thy memory tell,
Who here among the blessed am most blest,
Though low the sphere in which our spirits dwell.
The pure affections lit in every breast,
By ardent light drawn from the Holy Ghost,
Here in our order give us joy and rest;

And if a higher blessedness is lost,
  And lowly to your eyes appears our lot,
  'Tis that neglect or faithlessness has crost
Our vows, and made them be, or seem, forgot.'
  And I to her: 'Your lineaments so shine,
  Such change has on their earlier aspect wrought,
Something, I know not what, of the divine,
  That slow was I familiar looks to see;
  Now, aided by your words, no pain is mine.
But tell me, if in this felicity,
  So blessed, still you long for higher place,
  New friends to make, or greater wonders see?'
Then to the other shadows first her face
  She turned and smiled; and answered with a glow,
  Where the first flame of love had left its trace:
'Brother,' she said, 'our will and wish is so
  Stilled by great power of love, that what we would
  Is what we have, and no desire we know.
If longing for a higher circle could
  Be ours, then would our wishes disagree
  With will of Him who understands all good.'

. . . . . .

Then was it clear to me that everywhere
  In heaven is paradise; but yet that grace
  Rains not on all in the same measure there."

This contentment of the saints with the lowest place forms a beautiful pendant to the similar, yet so opposite, feeling in the dark and hopeless world of punishment, where the sufferers in every circle find each his own penalty great enough to absorb all his faculties, although we, who look on, know it to be so much less than the anguish which falls to others. When Piccarda has explained to him the reason of her lowly position, and the manner in which she was forced back into the world, and has pointed out close to her "the light of the

great Costanza," the wife of the Emperor Henry V., who was in the same way withdrawn from her convent, she begins to sing the Ave Maria, and, singing, disappears in the surrounding light like something dropped into water. After following her with his eyes as far as he could see, the poet turns to Beatrice, the object of his best desires, but finds her so shining and dazzling that for the moment he cannot look upon her. Questions, however, and doubts, rise in his mind, which appear in his face, though he ventures to say nothing of them; and Beatrice replies without being asked. She tells him first that Piccarda is as much an inhabitant of heaven as the blessed Mary herself, but appears here in the lowest sphere only that human understanding may be able to discern the difference of glory between the greatest and the least; and then resolves his doubt about the fault itself, which, as it was involuntary, the nun's vows being broken not by her will but by violence of men, Dante cannot understand to have involved any real sin. Beatrice, however, shows him how a higher virtue was possible, how death might have been faced rather than the evil submitted to. As she speaks, she looks at him with eyes so full of the light of love that his strength is overwhelmed by it, and he "almost loses himself," casting down his eyes. As they mount from circle to circle, this wonder is always repeated. He knows they have risen higher by the increased light and beauty in her face, which shines ever more and more heavenly fair; and in the ascent, he himself becomes more and more capable of looking upon her glory, though in these first regions, and occasionally throughout their progress, it becomes too much for him.

Discoursing upon the nature of vows and other high

subjects, they take their flight again, "like an arrow which has reached its mark before the bowstring has ceased to quiver," into the second sphere. Here his lady entered with such gladness that her coming made the very planet more lucid. "And if the star changed and smiled," cries the poet, "how much more I, whom nature made so changeable!" This next planet is Mercury. "As in a fishery, where the waters are tranquil and pure, the fish dart forward when anything appears from without," so the poet saw "more than a thousand splendours" rush towards the new-comers. "Behold one who will increase our love!" they cry; and as they approach, the increase of gladness in each blessed spirit is made evident by the glow of rising light which surrounds them. The new company receive Dante with the warmest courtesy. "O well-born soul!" cries one among them, "if thou wouldst have anything from us, take it at thy pleasure." This is the spirit of the Emperor Justinian, who, wrapping himself in light as the sun sometimes draws the mist around it, describes to the poet the glory and power of the empire, glancing back over Roman history to trace the triumphs of the "sacred sign," the imperial eagle; and ending with a warning to the Ghibelline party, with which Dante had identified himself, to put no trust in "the yellow lilies"—the adventurous and meddling power of France. He then describes the world which he now inhabits. This "little star," he says, "decorates itself with fine spirits whose works have brought them fame and honour." To measure their rewards with their deservings is one source of pleasure to them, he adds, the exact and beautiful balance of divine law being of all sights the most ex-

quisite to a righteous lawgiver. This perfects their love of justice, and makes them incapable of wrong; and as divers voices joined together make sweet music, so their different degrees of recompense create a perfect harmony.

When he has thus spoken—raising a psalm of Hosanna to the God of Sabaoth, to which the others keep time with harmonious movement, glowing and shining with double light—Justinian and his companion spirits disappear, leaving still new wonderings and doubts in Dante's mind which whisper to him, "Speak! speak! speak to thy lady that she may quench thy thirst with her sweet discourse." That reverence, however, which so queened her over him, "by B. and by icé," the very sound of her name, kept him silent. "But that same Beatrice" cut short this suspense, and began "radiating over me such a smile as would make a man blessed in the flames." With this celestial smile she begins a long explanation of the means by which God combined justice and mercy in the redemption of man. While she is speaking they ascend into another planet, Venus, the home of blessed love, as Mercury has been of law:—

"I saw not how we made the ascent, but knew
That we had entered there by the great glow
Upon my lady's face of beauty new.
As in a flame the brilliant sparkles show,
And through one voice you other voices hear
When one holds on, and th' others come and go;
So in that glory other lights appear
Moving, or less or more, a circling crowd,
As shall be still through the eternal sphere.
And never winds have fallen from stormy cloud,
Visible or invisible, but seem
Slow, howsoever strong they sweep and loud,

To him who once these heavenly lights had seen,
Come to us, leaving the eternal round,
Set first astir by highest seraphim.
Behind the foremost ranks rose such a sound,
Hosanna! ringing sweet, as that my heart
With wish to hear again is ever bound.
And then came one, close to us pressed, apart.
'We are all ready,' thus he spake alone,
'To give thee joy, since thou hast found the art
In us to do thee pleasure; I am one
Of those who move in circle and accord
With heavenly powers, whom in thy earthly home
Once thou hadst thus addressed with gracious word,
"Ye who the third great heaven with meaning move;"
Yet to stand still will something sweet afford,
If it please thee, so full are we of love.'
First to my lady then I raised my face,
Reverent; and, satisfied and sure, above
All measure by her look, turned to the place
Where still that light, which so much promised, shone—
And, 'Tell me who thou art?' I said, with trace
Of a most eager longing in my tone.
Oh how the glowing gladness rose and grew
To higher joy from former joyance grown,
When thus I spake, with brightness ever new!
'Short was the time earth held me from the dead,
But many a harm that will be—if less few
My earthly days, had been forestalled,' he said.
'The gladness that rays round me like a sheath
Of its own silk by living creature spun,
My brightness hides me: while I yet had breath,
Well lov'dst thou me, and by good cause was won
To love me, and still more hadst known, if death
Had spared the blooms that to no fruiting came.'"

This spirit is Carlo Martello, whom Dante has known and loved in the flesh, and with whom he maintains now

a philosophical argument upon the strange successions that happen in human families. "How can the bitter come from the sweet?" asks Dante. The reply to this question is given with the poet's usual solemn gravity of mystical reasoning. "If you would but build on the foundation of nature," says the saintly king, "and follow her guidance, you would have good people; but you turn to a religious life him who was born to gird himself with the sword, and make a ruler of a fluent talker—therefore have your steps gone astray." After this meeting, another "splendour" approaches the poet in the shape of Cunizza of Este, whose adventures on earth do not seem to have specially fitted her for heaven, but who is found there nevertheless, by what partiality of the poet, or adaptation of the principle "she has loved much," such as it is so natural for friends to make, we do not pretend to say. Cunizza's own view of the subject is, that the influence of Venus upon her has kept her low in the spiritual world. When she disappears, as Carlo Martello has already done, in the circle of lights from which she came forth to speak with Dante, another spirit, a Provençal poet called Folco, comes forward, and is thus described:—

"The other joy which had already won
My notice, now grew to a marvel great,
Like some fine ruby struck by mid-day sun;
For gladness brightness gives in that high state,
As here come smiles: and as below each one,
As sadness grows, grows dark by mournful fate."

After this the travellers ascend into the sun; but of the manner in which they mount, Dante again is unaware. He perceives no more than

thought first comes into his mind. Beatrice, however, who glows more and more glorious in her beauty, calls upon him to thank the Sun of Angels, who has raised him so far; and the poet is so carried out of himself by devotion and gratitude, that even Beatrice is eclipsed and forgotten. Here he suddenly finds himself with his companion placed in the centre of a circle of beautiful lights, "brightnesses living and triumphant," who are still "more sweet in voice than brilliant in aspect," and who circle three times round the pair of passengers. Then they pause, but not as if ending the mystic measure:—

"So have I seen fair ladies in the dance
Arrested, silent, listening for the notes
To which their steps harmonious might advance."

This circle of solemn dancers is formed of the great theologians of the Church, among whom Thomas Aquinas, who is their spokesman, announces himself as the second. There are twelve of them; and Solomon is among the band. When each has been indicated to the wondering poet in the centre of the circle, they move round again in unspeakable harmony and high accord:—

"—Like the sacred bells that tell the time,
And call, because she loves, the bride of God,
To praise the Bridegroom in the early prime
Of morn: on this side and on that abroad
Soft chiming with such sweet alternate note
As moves the willing soul to love and lode;
Thus saw I all this glorious circle float,
Moving, and rendering voice for voice in tune
And sweetness such as never human throat
Could reach, save there where every joy has room."

When these glorious spirits, in their round, have re-

gained the point from which each started, Thomas Aquinas again speaks, and narrates to Dante how Divine Providence had raised up "two princes" for the restoration and guidance of the Church, one of whom burned with the ardour of a seraph, while the other was in wisdom as one of the cherubim. These are St Francis and St Dominic. Thomas, being himself a Dominican, tells the poet the story of St Francis, adding a lamentation over his own Order, which has already strayed from the rule, and neglected the true riches which their founder had taught them to desire. When St Thomas concludes his tale, "the holy mill" begins its round once more, and immediately is seen to be encompassed by another circle, joining motion to motion and song to song. These "two garlands of eternal roses" circle round the travellers, responding to each other with perfect harmony—in song, in dance, and in glow of lovely flame, light rejoicing with light. Then they pause by one impulse, as a pair of eyes open and close together; and a voice, to which Dante turns "like the needle to the star," is raised from the outer circle. It is now St Bonaventura, on earth a brother of the Franciscan Order, who speaks, and who is moved, "by the love which makes him beautiful," to celebrate the greatness of the other leader, St Dominic, as Thomas Aquinas had done of his own saint and chief. Bonaventura repeats what his predecessor had said of the "two champions," raised up by the Head of the Church for the succour of His spouse, whom it is meet to celebrate together, and tells the story of the "Holy Athlete," Dominic, the companion and equal of the loving and simple Francis, the lover of poverty. Bonaventura, too, laments the falling off of his Order from its first love and la-

and tells Dante the names of the twelve—all doctors and learned theologians—who are with him in his band, the greatest among whom are Chrysostom and St Anselm. After the narrative there ensues a mystic dance of the two circles within each other, in which the strain of all the poet's faculties to carry the enthusiasm of adoration ever higher is more impressive than the glory of which he speaks. Then Thomas Aquinas resumes, in order to solve a problem which he perceives is troubling the mind of Dante. This concerns something he himself has said in his previous speech, that "There shall rise no second" equal to Solomon, and is a piece of close scholastic reasoning, into which it is unnecessary for us to enter. After this, Beatrice asks the surrounding lights to expound to her companion the mystery of the Resurrection, and how it will affect them. At the very name of this great hope there is a brightening and increase of gladness over both circles. "He who laments that in order to live above we must first die, has never felt," cries Dante, "the refreshing of that eternal shower." Three times over the united choir sings "the One and Two and Three," the "Three and Two and One," without limit, and including all things, the Trinity which fills heaven and earth. Then from the greatest light of the first circle (apparently Solomon) comes "a modest voice, like that of the angel who spoke to Mary," describing the love which the spirit must ever feel for its familiar vesture, and the increase of glory and gladness which will follow when the body becomes once more the abode of the soul. An eager Amen rises from all the holy spirits as he speaks. "Perhaps not only for love of their own bodies," says Dante, "but also for the mothers, for

the fathers, and the others who were dear to them before they became eternal lights."

With this conclusion, the heavens widen round, and a circle of new light appears like the gleam of the horizon when it clears. And as in the first falling of evening the stars are seen gleaming faintly in the sky, so beyond the two rings that circle the pilgrims round, appear new crowds of beings, scarcely distinguishable, wheeling with the same movement. The dazzle of all this light and movement confuses the poet; but when he looks at Beatrice, so beautiful and smiling, his eyes, leaving those things which the mind cannot follow, gain strength to look up; and immediately he finds himself "alone with my lady, translated to a higher salvation." This higher bliss is in the planet Mars, where great soldiers, placed above the theologians, have their eternal recompense:—

"Soon I perceived that we had risen on high,
By rosy smiling of the star that showed
Redder than it was wont: then, with a cry,
My voice, my heart, all that in me abode,
With warmth which such new grace might well inspire,
I made of me a holocaust to God.
And scarce within my breast had paled the fire
Of sacred sacrifice, when swift I knew
My offering all accepted in entire
Content. And ah, what gleam of glory true!
What roseate light in these two rays there shone!
I cried, 'O Sun! O Elios! in what new
Adornment hast thou decked them?' As upon
Our sky between the great and the lesser lights
Of the two poles, the mighty path is strown,
With galaxy of stars whitening the nights,
A wonder, which with doubt all learning mars;
Thus on the depth the constellated lights

Have, with the shining of a thousand stars,
In circling round where four great limbs conjoin,
Writ full the sacred symbol upon Mars.
Here memory speaks, more wise than wit of mine,
For on this cross the lamping lights read CHRIST.
I know no way to image such design;
But he who takes his cross and follows CHRIST
Will pardon me unequal to the task
When in that brightness glimmering he sees CHRIST."

Dante is transported by this sight as he had not yet been with anything he saw, and especially by the song which came to him confusedly breathing from the cross, in such chiming as the pipe and the harp make, to one at too great a distance to distinguish the notes. He is rapt in the delight of the melody, though he cannot distinguish the Hymn, except the words "arise" and "conquer," which come to him detached from the sense. Their sweetness fills him with such ecstasy of pleasure, that never before was he so enchained by music.

Silence however, soon falls upon the sweet lyre, and the holy cords tuned and sounded by the right hand of heaven. It is that the new-comer may ask what he will that they become silent. "How could they be deaf to just prayer," cries Dante, "when they thus agreed to silence that I might speak?" Before he could make any question, however, his eye was caught by a light which came like a shooting-star from the corner of an arm to the foot of the cross, and, shining "like a fire through alabaster," addressed him in the words which Anchises had employed in the Elysian fields to greet Æneas:—

"Oh sanguis meus! O super infusa
Gratia Dei! sicut tibi, cui
Bis unquam cœli janua reclusa!"

Hearing these words the poet turned, as was his wont, to consult Beatrice with a look, but was struck dumb to see the growing beauty in her. " Such a smile glowed in her eyes that I seemed to fathom the depths of grace and of my paradise." He hears the spirit speak to her in high tones beyond his comprehension; but as it gradually descends within the range of mortal intelligence, he catches the sound of an ascription of praise to the Trinity, " which has been so courteous to my seed," and gradually makes out that the speaker is his own ancestor Cacciaguida, from whom, or rather from whose wife, the Alighieri derived their name. This ancestor had been a soldier and Crusader under the Emperor Conrad, who made him a knight, and he discourses long to his descendant upon the degeneracy of Florence and the nobleness of her primitive state, when she dwelt within her first circle of walls in brotherhood and homely purity of living. " Tell me," cries Dante with natural eagerness— " tell me, dear beginning of the race, who were our ancestors, and how thy early life was spent? Tell me of the sheepfold of St John—how it was of old, and who the people then worthy of the highest place?"—to all which questions Cacciaguida replies very fully, concluding with a prophecy of the misfortunes which are about to overtake his questioner. Here occurs the often-repeated allusion to the bitter bread of strangers which he shall eat, and the hardness of ascending and descending by the stairs, " *scale*," of another's bounty—a reference which is constantly believed to refer to the Della Scala family, though in the same breath Cacciaguida celebrates one of these Scaligeri as the " great Lombard " in whose courtesy Dante shall find shelter, and prophesies the

greatness of another—the young Can' Grande. While Dante broods over these evil auguries, which he has already heard from so many warning voices, Beatrice calls him to himself, bidding him remember that she dwells near to Him who rights every wrong:—

"I turned me quickly to the tender sound
Of her dear voice, my comfort: how I saw
Her eyes shine holy love, transcends the bound
Of words to tell; therefore, such words in awe
I leave, not only for their feebleness,
But that the mind needs strength and help to draw
Itself back to that point of nobleness.
Yet gazing at her, every thought was freed
From all desire and longing that were less
Than noble. For the eternal joy decreed
Fully to shine upon her blessed eyes,
Reflected from them, satisfied my need.
Then conquering with a smile within which lies
All light, she said, 'Now turn and listen thou,
Not in my face is all thy paradise.'"

Dante turns his strayed attention, after this beautiful warning, to the world of lights about him, and distinguishes one after another, in the stars that move harmonious over the surface of the cross, the great warriors of all time. Then turning again to Beatrice, he perceives, by the changing of her colour, immediate as the change from blushing to paleness in a lady's cheek, that they have left the ruddy light of Mars and have reached the "whiteness of the temperate star" above, Jupiter—the sixth heaven. Here it seemed to him that the atoms of light formed letters of human language. "As birds rising from the banks of a stream, as if saluting their new pasture, form themselves in long lines or troops,"

so holy creatures here flew about, sometimes singing, sometimes settling in the form of letters which represented the words they sang. The words thus formed were —*Diligite justitiam*, and *Qui judicatis terram* (love righteousness, ye judges of the earth). Then the flying spirits settle upon the M, the last letter of this phrase, in sparks innumerable, such as rise from a lighted brand when it is shaken in the air; and this gradually forms into the figure of an eagle. When fully constituted, each individual light glowing like a little ruby upon which the sun shines (we have already had the same image of splendid brilliancy), the eagle with one voice, though made of so many souls, speaks. This emblematical figure is formed of the just all uniting in perfect concord as one being, and its discourse is of Divine justice and Dante's foolish human questioning of hows and whys—obstinate questionings which are no less lively in the world now than they were in his day. He is then informed who the great spirits are who compose the different portions of the divine bird; among them, to his wonder, are two souls unlikely to be there—one Ripheus of Troy, and the other the Emperor Trajan, to whom Dante has a special devotion. The argument upon predestination and Divine justice which runs through these cantos is to Dante "as sweet medicine," though he believes what is said without seeing why, and the truths, though credited, are still hidden from his intelligence.

He is now on the verge of the seventh heaven; and, turning as usual to Beatrice, finds that she no longer smiles; which she explains by saying that if she smiled he would be like Semele, consumed by the intolerable glory; for her beauty increases as she ascends, and

would be now too great to be borne if it were not carefully tempered to his mortal eyes. When they have entered "the great crystal which bears the vocable of Saturn," Dante sees a ladder of gold ascending so high that his eyes cannot reach the height of it, and beholds multitudes of splendours flitting about like birds ascending and descending the holy stairs. One of them lingers near the travellers, whom Dante looks at, yet does not venture to accost till his lady gives him leave, when he asks timidly why it is that the delightful symphony of Paradise, so sweet in the lower spheres, should here be silent? The light replies that this is done for the same reason which banishes the smile from the face of Beatrice—his mortal faculties not being capable of supporting either the music or the smiling of this elevated sphere. Dante, always full of difficulties about election and free will, then asks the spirit that speaks how it is that he has been predestined to this service? Not the most shining soul in heaven, not the seraphim whose eyes are always fixed on God, can answer such a question, the spirit replies, too deep is it in the depths of the Divine counsels; but he gladly tells his own name and story—Pietro Damiano, holy hermit and saint, and, against his will, Cardinal. This latter fact leads him to an outcry of holy indignation against the luxurious priests who spoil the Church — an exclamation which draws many of his brethren in sympathy towards him, who, growing more beautiful with every movement, and finally encircling him in a group, give utterance to a voice so wonderful that Dante can compare it to nothing on earth; and he understood it not, no more than the thunder, but, astounded and troubled, sought his usual refuge:—

"I turned, as turns in every dream the child
Where most it trusts, in trouble to my guide,
And she, as mother draws her son, all wild
And pallid in his terror, to her side,
With voice accustomed to dispense all bliss,
'Knowest thou not thou art in heaven?' replied;
'And know'st thou not that heaven all holy is,
And that which here is done in love is wrought?
Now what had happed to thee thou canst not miss
But see—if they had sung as in thy thought
Was wished, or I had smiled: since this one cry
Such trouble has in all thy being wrought.'"

Consoling him thus, she bids him turn, that he may not miss the sight of many illustrious spirits; and raising his eyes as she directed, he sees a hundred little spheres, making each other more beautiful with their mutual radiance. One of the most lustrous of these "pearls" speaks to him, and reveals itself to be St Benedict, who established the name of Christ on that Mount Cassino which had been dedicated to the worship of Apollo. St Benedict points out to the poet the souls of other great brethren, pure like himself, whose hearts have been true to their cloister vows, but laments, at the same time, the small number of his followers of whom so much can be said. Dante asks if he may have the grace to see this holy father as he is, without the veil of light which encloses him, and is told that this is impossible here, but that it will be granted to him in the higher heaven. Then Benedict turns to his companions, and, clustering close together, they go upward like a whirlwind. "The sweet lady with one sole sign" impelled Dante to follow upon the ladder by which they had gone, and, by her influence, carried him up so swiftly that no earthly movement could have

vied with his wing. Sooner than the reader could put his finger to the fire and withdraw it, the poet found himself entering the upper circle of the heavens at "the sign which follows Taurus," the constellation of the Twins, those "glorious stars, lights full of strength," under the sway of which he first breathed Tuscan air, and first set out upon this journey, and to which he attributes all the genius which lifts him above the vulgar. Here Beatrice bids him pause and look back upon the road he has traversed; "For thou art now so near the final salvation," she tells him, "that thy eyes should be clear and keen." When he turned and gazed below, according to her command, over the seven spheres through which he had travelled, he saw "this globe" of earth so vile in appearance that he smiled at it, and counted him wisest who despises it most. Besides this view of our mortal world, he looked down also upon the moon (on this side without any spots to mar her beauty), the glorious sons of Hyperion, the stars of Maia and of Dione, the temperate sphere of Jove between the father and son, Mars and Saturn, and all their greatness, and their velocity, and the infinite distance in which they lie. All this, and also the miserable little earth, which makes so much of itself, was visible to him, from its mountains to its seas. "Then my eyes turned to the beautiful eyes:" still further heights and glories were yet to be attained.

THE FIXED STARS.

We have now traversed all the humbler circles, and have reached the very home and centre of the blessed.

We are made to understand, however, that these various elevations of the stars are in themselves a symbol, to impress more clearly upon the mind the different eminences of merit and glory; for each one of all the blessed spirits with whom the poet has spoken, has an appointed place in the empyrean—the heaven of heavens—in which, finally, it is Dante's privilege to see them assembled, in high session,—the Court of the Queen of Heaven. Every imaginable variety of light, and combination of stars and rays and jewelled reflections, would almost seem to have been exhausted in these earlier halls of heaven; but, as the ascent advances, the poet's imagination widens into a more and more mystical wealth of symbol, a more and more unspeakable shining of every manifestation of light and glory which words can indicate. That the strain of understanding becomes too great for most readers, and that, indeed, the poet himself is lost in the mist of light he has conjured up, it is scarcely necessary to say. But yet it is wonderful and admirable how far the power and intensity of his genius carry the mind, with at least some feeling of comprehension, some ineffable idea of knowledge acquired. There is a pause, however, on the edge of this realm of glory—a sudden return to the dews and sweetness of the poor little earth which he had so scorned from that sublime height, yet to which he goes back fondly unawares, to cull his most tender imagery from its homely shades:—

"As broods the bird, whom the loved foliage hides,
Seated upon the nest where her new born
Are covered close by night, which darkling glides
O'er all that lives—and waits the longed-for morn,
That will reveal their dear looks to her eyes,

And light her to the food which, hither borne
In safety, makes her toil seem nought: who lies
Watching the lingering night through openings green,
And with an ardent gaze waits till the skies
Wakes to the sun, or the soft dawn between:
Thus stood my lady, with her head upraised,
And, all intent, turned to the south, where seen
Longest, the great sun lingers: and thus gazed
So wistfully and long that, seeing her,
I, too, my eager thoughts expectant raised,
With the new stir which rising hopes confer,
And for brief space 'twixt hope and wonder stood."

This pause "between one and the other" was, however, of very brief duration, for soon the heavens lighted up with new splendour, and Beatrice cried, "Behold the host and triumph of Christ!" Her countenance shone as she spoke, so full of delight that the poet cannot even attempt to describe it; and, following her gaze, he beheld a sun rising among all those spheres of light, and giving radiance to them, as Diana in a clear night, when it is the time of full moon, rises among her nymphs. "O Beatrice, sweet guide and dear!" he cries in his ecstasy of wondering admiration. "This is the might," she says, "and the wisdom which have opened a path between earth and heaven." The transport into which Dante is rapt by this sight is so great that his mind, expanded by the divine food, grows out of itself, and cannot remember what it was. He is roused from his trance of enthusiasm by Beatrice, who bids him look at her. "Thou hast now seen that which makes thee capable of enduring my smile," she says; and again all the poet's powers are called into exercise to describe something beyond the power of words to tell.

"If all the tongues that have been fed with sweetest milk by Polyhymnia and her sisters were sounding forth to help me, I could not reach the thousandth part of the truth, singing that holy smile and blessed aspect," he cries, lamenting the weakness of his words, which go halting in their attempt to figure Paradise. "Why art thou so in love with my face?" says Beatrice; "here is the beautiful garden which flowers under the rays of Christ." The reader, however, will feel, we do not doubt, that these glimpses of Beatrice and her holy smile are as solid ground in the sea of light and glory. The "throng of splendours" are less real to us than this illuminated countenance seen more and more fully lit with the growing radiance of holiness and love. Dante, however, at the reproof of his lady, turns again to the scene before him, and gives himself up "to the battle of the feeble eyelids." And as he had sometimes beheld a flowery meadow on earth lighted with the rays of the sun coming through a cloud, though the sun itself was not visible to him, so now he saw the crowd of splendours all illuminated from above, though he could not perceive the fount from which their shining came; for the central light, which was still beyond his power of endurance, rose upward to save his feeble gaze, until other heavenly expedients could be made use of to accustom him to the highest glory of all. For this merciful purpose, as he is still incapable of beholding her, the Virgin herself—"that beautiful flower whom I invoke morning and evening"—is suddenly surrounded by a cresset, which, dropping from heaven, at once crowns and circles round her, and singing at the same time (for all the images are mixed with bewildering splendour) with a sweetness of

melody which makes all the songs of earth like grating thunder, proclaims itself to be the angelical love which once hailed her on earth. This song goes circling round, and all the other lights join in, till the name of Mary resounds throughout heaven. Dante's eyes have no power to follow this crowned light as it rises into invisible heights, following the still more glorious sun, which had already elevated itself to spare his weak vision; and we are relieved when a pause occurs, after this intoxicating dazzlement of glory, of which we, no more than Dante, can make much. Then our human faculties are again perplexed by a strange change in the strain. When the higher lights are thus withdrawn, Beatrice appeals to the great attendant spirits—"the elect who sit at the marriage-supper of the Lamb"—to communicate their grace to this just man, who is permitted to taste of that which falls from their table before death has touched him. It may be noted here that throughout Paradise there is no wonder expressed in respect to Dante, no curious looks bent upon him. Hell and Purgatory have stared and wondered, lost in the marvel of this apparition—a man who breathed the warm breath of life, and cast a shadow amid all their unsubstantial forms—but in heaven there is no surprise at this or any other prodigy. The blessed are too wonderful themselves, too happy and full of tender eagerness to do the traveller pleasure, to notice this small marvel; and there is no possibility of doubt in their minds that whosoever comes among them comes by the will of God.

There occurs here, however, as we have said, the strangest pause in this heavenly progress. Out from among the most beautiful of the lights to whom Beatrice

appealed, comes "a fire so happy," that none there was more brilliant. "Oh, my holy sister, thy prayer has detached me from this beautiful sphere," he says, after circling three times round her. She addresses him as the eternal light of "that great man to whom our Lord bequeathed the keys;" for it is St Peter himself who thus stands forth in front of the dazzling assembly. Having arrived at the highest rank of the blessed, into the very fulness of the blaze of heaven, on the verge of the visible presence, the enthroned splendour, of the Trinity, the quiver of human faculties overstrained, shows itself all at once in the poet. Of all things that could occur to him there, nothing more likely comes uppermost than that he should have himself examined on the principles of his faith by the great Apostles, the first preachers of Christianity. As the bachelor, he tells us, prepares for his examination, and says nothing till the master shall have proposed his question, so Dante, "arming himself with reasonings, waits for the trial." St Peter questions, What is faith? which the poet defines "in the veracious style of thy dear brother" Paul, who, it is curious to note, though often referred to, is never seen in the heavenly regions. In his satisfaction with the answer, the Apostle goes three times round Dante, as he did round Beatrice at the beginning of the interview, and blesses him, singing as he goes; upon which, breaking forth in the very centre of heaven into the expression of his supreme hope and desire on earth, the poet pauses, and carries all our sympathies with him in his sudden descent:—

"If it might hap that this my sacred verse,
To which both heaven and earth have lent a hand,
And which has worn me lean—should e'er reverse

The cruel doom which bars me from my land,
From the fair sheepfold where, a lamb, I slept,
Assailed by wolves that there held full command:
With other voice, in other garb than kept
My youth, I, poet, should return and take
My crown from the baptismal font, where crept
Into my being those great faiths which make
The soul received by God—since Peter thus
Circled my forehead thrice for their great sake."

Strange lingering of human longing, which not all the beatitudes of heaven could content! It is while all Paradise is shining before him, and another Apostle is advancing to question him, that the solemn gloom of the old Baptistery at Florence suddenly opens upon his sight, with the "loved laurel," the poet's crown, which might still await him there—though the place was one he was never to enter again, and the reward such as he was never permitted to have. The examination then resumed does not interest us so much. St James questions the poet upon the nature of hope, and St John upon that of charity; and, after the curious, solemn catechism is over, the whole heavens burst forth into loud acclaim, singing "Holy, holy, holy!" Nothing could be more strange than this interposition of formal reasoning, question and answer, into the midst of those ineffable, indescribable glories. Here is the climax of all those profound theological disquisitions which have marked every step of the poet's progress through heaven. The realism of the encounter, more quaintly apparent, no doubt, now, than it was when the poem was written, brings out its strange height of mysticism. The reader might be tempted to smile at this matter-of-fact mode of preparation for the highest sphere, if he

were not overawed by the mysterious exaltation of the strain, and the tremendous earnestness of the poet himself, always so entirely convinced of the reality and seriousness of what he says. No smile or possibility of smiling is in him. He goes through the final ordeal with an intense and awful strain of all his powers, feeling nothing in it that is not solemn, great, and terrible —a fit preparation for the very inner court and high assembly of heaven.

When this trial is concluded, there suddenly appears "a fourth light" beside the Apostles, and Dante is told that this is Adam, who immediately relates his own history, though with what aim, at this precise point of the poem, it is difficult to see. Then all heaven rings with a great song of praise:—

"Then 'To the Father, to the Son, and to
The Holy Ghost,' through Paradise forth rung
A 'Gloria' great, in perfect sweetness true,
Which rapt my soul. I saw, as thus they sung,
What seemed of the whole universe one smile,
So that both sight and song enchantment flung
About me. Oh great joy! oh glorious wile
Of gladness! oh complete and perfect peace!
Oh riches priceless, without wish or guile!"

The last human break in the ascending flight of mind and heart towards the final height, follows close upon this triumphant song, when Peter, "changing colour"—a phenomenon which silences all the choirs—fulminates, as never any Pope has fulminated, against his successors in the Holy See—"Those who have usurped on earth my place, my place, my place!" he cries, with the vehemence of indignation. "And thou, son, who art weighed

down towards the earth, when thou returnest hither, open thy mouth, conceal not that which I do not conceal," says the great Apostle. After this stern utterance, which makes Beatrice pale and to tremble, and causes an eclipse in heaven as when the Redeemer died, the great lights go upwards, rising like mists in autumn; and another circle is past. Beatrice once more bids Dante look down on the great distance he has traversed. Then they, too, move upward, leaving the "nest of Leda," the constellation of the Twins, in which all these marvels have passed. But how Beatrice finds a passage through that brightness the poet is unable to tell.

They come now into a region without human inhabitant or voice or semblance of man—a mysterious centre of light, the sphere from which all motion begins, the "primo mobile," a world of space possessed by the divine mind, from which energy flows to all ends of the earth. As Beatrice explains to her charge the manner in which the universal world takes all its force of motion and progress from this centre of life, she shows him the circle upon circle of fire in which revolve, round the central spark of divine flame, innumerable companies of angels, undistinguishable by mortal vision. The centre itself is a point of light so intense that no eyes can look at it, and the face of the gazer must be covered—and so minute that the smallest star in the firmament would seem a moon beside it. The circles closest to it revolve most quickly; and those at a distance, which are much wider, are also slower in motion. The circles are nine in number—the perfect number, of which Dante has already told us that it is mystically connected with the life and death of his lady: it repre-

sents here, the sum of all heavenly perfection, as the three hierarchies into which it is divided represent the Holy Trinity. The circles nearest the centre are the seraphim and cherubim. The others are Thrones, Dominations, Powers, Archangels, Princes of heaven, and beyond all a great ring of simple angels, so wide that the messenger of Juno, the wide round of the rainbow, would not be too great to contain it. Breathing forth eternal from these moving circles of blessed spirits, in three strains of melody which mark the three orders of gladness, a great and ceaseless Hosanna for ever rolls towards the centre. Her countenance all glowing with a smile, Beatrice stands for a moment silent, gazing at the central point of light, which had "conquered" Dante, as too brilliant for mortal eye to behold; then seeing, though he says nothing, some shadows of doubt rise in his mind, she clears them away. "From this point depends heaven and all nature," she says, and describes to him minutely the angelic rings of light which he has seen. While she speaks, the glory dies from his sight, as stars disappear in the blaze of day, and Dante fixes again his full gaze upon Beatrice. The beauty in her face had by this time resumed its full perfection, so that no words can describe its glory:—

"The beauty that I gazed upon excels
Not only thought of ours, but well I deem
That in no other than her Maker dwells
Power to enjoy so pure and full a beam
Of loveliness. I own me all outdone,
As never yet was player by his theme,
Be it or gay or tragic, overcome;
For as the sun, that dazzles trembling eyes,
So all myself melts from my memory, won

When but the thoughts of such a smile arise.
From the first day when I beheld her face,
Ne'er has my song forsook the high emprize
To celebrate and laud my lady's grace.
Now must the singing cease : I may not run
This fair course further, having reached the place
Where artists all must pause, their skill outdone."

A touch of sadness is in the acknowledgment of this perfect glory, which mortal words and mortal faculties cannot follow. On the height which we are now about to enter, Beatrice has her seat, that place which she left "beside the ancient Rachel" to succour her poet; and now their long companionship is nearly over. One step further she yet leads him, to the banks of a stream. "Light in the form of a river, flaming with splendour between two banks bright with the flowers of spring." This is the river of life. "Of this water thou must drink before thy thirst can be fully satisfied," she says; and plunging into it eagerly, as a babe to his food, Dante, on emerging, beholds at last before him the two courts, angelical and human, and attains to the empyrean, the highest summit of heavenly glory and perfect bliss.

THE HIGHEST HEAVEN.

All the antechambers of the celestial world are now passed; class by class Dante has been made acquainted with the denizens of heaven, from those who stood in the lowest place, bearing in sweet submission and humbleness the lessened glory made necessary by imperfections which cannot be atoned for even in heaven —through the highest spirits of earth and the assembled

Powers and Dominations of heaven, men and angels agreed in one supreme aim and blessedness—until he reaches the central splendours of the empyrean, the palace and court of God. The river of life has supplied the final grace, and now he stands gazing at such an assembly as never man saw before. The court of the blessed is like a great white rose with innumerable leaves, in innumerable ranks, one line of spotless spirits breaking upon another. "See how many are in our convent of the white stoles!" Beatrice says to him, when he first beholds the glorious amphitheatre all lined, rank rising above rank, with those white souls in their glistening robes. Was it, perhaps, the old amphitheatre at Verona, or some other huge theatre of the ancient world, full and rustling with a jubilant crowd, that gave the poet this idea? He is generally very frank in telling us when this is the case, but he says nothing of it here. Such, however, is the aspect of this wonderful place. Fluttering about the petals of the eternal rose, from line to line of the white-robed hierarchy, as bees flit among the flowers, are "the others," the court of angels, disclosed by this difference. Their wings of gold, their robes white as snow, and their faces radiant as pure flame, they flutter among the great company of saved souls—brethren and ministers, enjoying and enjoyed. The poet stands gazing upon this glorious spectacle with mingled wonder and delight, and the supreme satisfaction of hope attained—like a pilgrim whom his vow has brought over land and sea to some longed-for shrine, and who now gazes around him, already framing in his mind the story he will have to tell of it to the friends whom he has left behind. If the barbarians were struck dumb by the sight of Rome,

how much more the poet thus coming from the human to the divine, from time to eternity, "and from Florence," he adds, with the wonted outcry of bitter love in his heart, "to a people just and pure"! He stands silent, glad to be left in silence, incapable of speech, taking in the first aspect of this most wondrous court and company, but unaware at first of any individual feature in it.

"Thus the whole glorious form of Paradise
At the first look before me full was spread,
But on no special point had fixed my eyes,
When in new-kindled zeal I turned my head
With things I understood not, as my plan
And usage was, to be interpreted,
Towards my lady by me: and began—
But one I looked for and another found
Instead of Beatrice, an aged man
Robed like the glorious folk were ranged around,
His eyes and countenance lighted up benign
With gladness, and by such kind aspect crowned
As is of tender father, mark and sign.
'And she, where is she?' quick then questioned I.
He said, 'Now to fulfil thy wishes all, is mine.
For this she called me from my seat on high.
Raise thou thine eyes to the third circle, where
Once more thy lady thou mayst yet descry
Upon the throne her merits won her there.'
Then without answering upward quick I gazed,
And saw her, crowned with rays reflected fair
From the eternal light. More high upraised
Than to the thund'rous sky from the deep sea
The distance is, was she on whom I gazed
Uplift above and placed afar from me.
Yet not for this was veiled her fairest face.
'Oh lady, in whose being still must be
My hope! thou who hast left celestial trace
Even in deep Hell of thy most blessed feet,

For my salvation led to th' evil place!
Humbly thy grace and bounty here I greet.
By all the wondrous things that I have seen;
By all the mystic ways and modes most meet
To change the heart, have I, a captive, been
From slavery brought to freedom pure and high.
Ah, let the greatness of thy lofty mien
Dwell in the soul which thou hast healed, that I
May please thee still when Death all ties has rent!'
This was my prayer. And lo! afar, on high,
She looked down on me, smiled—then turned intent,
Back to the fountain of eternal day."

This is the last interchange between the pair. High in the third circle, at the feet of the Virgin, "seated by the ancient Rachel," pausing a moment to look down to give a last smile to him whom she has guided out of all the snares of life and the problems of his time, then turning to fix her eyes again upon the final goal—the face of God Himself—Beatrice is left in glory: and the man Dante, ever lonely though in heaven, is left below. But now he makes no complaint; the worst of separation, the bitterness of bereavement, is over for him even when banished back to earth: for now he knows where she is, and what, and how faithful and beautiful. May he but please her when Death gives him the final dismissal! St Bernard talks on gently while the poet sustains this last shock, directing his eyes towards the queen of heaven herself, Mary, who is the centre of the eternal rose, the throned and beautiful Regent of the Royal Assembly. At her feet sits Eve, she who opened the wound which Mary closed; and a line of Hebrew women, through whom the promise came, descends to the seventh grade, dividing those who believed in Christ be-

fore He came, from those, not yet filled up in number, who are believers since His coming. Bernard describes the great company from the saints above to the crowd of baptised innocents below, and resolves some doubts which continue (as always) to rise in the poet's mind. Then he leads back his thoughts once more to the heavenly queen, whose "faithful Bernard" he is. And Dante hears the angel of the Annunciation hailing, "Mary, full of grace," in "a divine song," which all the court of heaven take up and echo, and sees her face shining with a joy unspeakable, a brightness more like God than anything he has seen. St Bernard then prays to the "Virgin Mother, daughter of thy son, humblest and highest of all things," to be gracious to the adoring poet left alone in forlornness of flesh and blood in such an ineffable assembly, who has seen one by one all the forms of spiritual life, that every cloud of mortality may be cleared from his eyes by her prayers, and that he may behold God. "See how Beatrice and the other blessed ones clasp their hands to echo my prayer!" says the venerable saint. "Those eyes, beloved of God, fixed on him who thus prayed, showed how open was her ear to devout supplications," adds the poet. "Then she turned back into the eternal light, in which, none can doubt, her eyes must penetrate further than those of any creature; and I drew near," he continues, "approaching the end of all desires." What he sees is a mysterious vision of light, in which three orbs of different colours are manifest. One of these appeared to reflect the other; the third was like fire proceeding from both. "Ah, how little words can say! how they fail to the conception!" he cries, in a sublime despair:—

"Like one who dreams and sees, but when is o'er
The dream, forgets, yet feels the passion thrill
Still through him of his dream; such guise I wore;
For though the vision dies, such drops distil
Of sweetness through my heart, as when the snows,
Unsealed by sunbeams warm, the runlets fill—
As, broken, to the winds, light leaves disclose
The Sibyl's sentence. Oh thou light supreme,
High raised above all thought! grant me that those
Great mysteries and wonders I have seen
Return a little to my mind and make
My lips so potent that some wandering gleam,
Some spark from thy great glory, I may wake
And leave to light the future: so rehearse
The tale that better knowledge men may take
Even for this little sounding of my verse,
And understand the triumphs of thy grace."

The reader will want no more beautiful or fit conclusion of the "Paradiso" than these words. For six hundred years, "this little sounding of my verse" has given many a high and worthy thought to multitudes of generations. But that fond fancy which marks our poet as human, the little signature of foolishness in the corner, which the sublimest of human productions is rarely free from, requires that this concluding strain of the great poem should end with the same word and phrase as the preceding portions. In order to introduce this cadence, he adds a few bewildered verses comparing himself to the mathematician who would measure the circle: "here I fail in the high fantasy," he says; "but my desire and will roll onward, moved like a wheel by that love which moves the sun and the other stars."

CHAPTER VI.

THE PROSE WORKS.

It is scarcely to be looked for that even the most supreme genius should be able to keep up in prose the lofty level raised in such verse as that of the 'Divine Comedy;' and there is good reason why the lesser productions of Dante, though dear to the student both for their own strange sake and for the minute rays of exposition which they throw upon his chief work, should be unlikely to attract popular sympathy or interest. To ourselves, we cannot deny, even the sometimes sublime strain of the "Paradiso" is impaired by the very large admixture of theology and philosophy to which the denizens of heaven give vent, in their anxiety to remove those "doubts" which so persistently assail the poet. And the three chief prose productions of Dante are all theology and philosophy, full of arguments so minute, so detailed, and so subtle, that the strain of attention required to follow them is beyond the powers of most readers. These works are the 'Convito,' the discourse 'Sul Volgare Eloquio,' and that called 'La Monarchia.' The two later of these seem to have been written for a special purpose: one, to encourage and recommend, as well as to defend

and justify, the use of "the vulgar tongue" in literary works; the other, to set forth and support the doctrine of that universal monarchy which was the ideal of the Ghibelline party. The 'Convito' seems to have had a less special origin. It would seem, according to the conclusion of most commentators, to have been written at Bologna during the pause in Dante's life which succeeded his first passionate resistance to the sentence which condemned him to exile. In the sting of that condemnation he rushed into conspiracy and party strife, trying, it scarcely mattered by what means, by violence or persuasion, to get himself back into his city. After a year or two, however, of this bootless struggling, Dante seems to have grown disgusted, as it was natural such a mind as his should, with the conspiracies and complots, and to have retired from the plotters into the studious quiet of Bologna, where he lived peaceably and in a softened disposition of mind, as long as he was permitted to remain in this neighbour town, which, for its part, though in a somewhat modified way, was also subject to the faction fights and revolutions which did so much harm to Florence. This was before the 'Divine Comedy' had been effectively begun; and if we may believe that Dante had already tried the beginning of his great poem in Latin verse, and had flung it aside as unsuccessful, it will throw some light upon the state of mind in which—poor, banished, and alone—he looked around him, wistfully regarding the dim mental horizon for some touch of hope, with his genius restless within him, and longing for utterance, of which as yet it had not found the most excellent way. In the 'Convito,' which he began in this mood, he took up the old plan of

the 'Vita Nuova,' which has been indicated in a previous chapter, but with no longer the inspiration of warm and exalted passion which had given that book a hold upon all hearts. He had not found his way yet into the long and solemn round of travelling by which Hell and Heaven were opened to him, and so many wonders made plain; but was in the same condition as the Psalmist when he called to earth and sky to show him "something good," and when his heart burned to see the prosperity of the wicked. In his very impatience, impotent as he seemed for all good, with the sense of failure bitter in him, not able even to begin, to his liking, the more important work which was in his mind, the mingled passion and difficulty with which he would seem to have stretched out his hand to his old tools has a great deal of pathos in it. The 'Vita Nuova,' with its artless artifices, and that strange unreality which rather enhances than detracts from its passion and fervour, must have been so satisfactory to the young poet as a mode of disclosing his heart to his friends, and to them so bewildering, yet so delightful, that (if it is permitted to speak of such a book as successful) Dante can have had no doubt of its success. And it is no unusual thing in the history of the imagination to see a first effort thus repeated in very perplexity of the restless and yet unformed genius, eager to do it knows not what, and to press on to further heights, not yet understood or fully descried.

The 'Convito'—banquet, symposium, feast of imagination and reason, spread before the world and his countrymen—was, according to the poet's scheme, to consist of fourteen poems of love and virtue, to be accompanied by

the bread of his exposition, thereby furnishing a full meal to the persons invited. All men, he says, according to the Philosopher (that is to say, according to Aristotle, the "master of all who know," the supreme teacher of philosophy, to Dante's mind and age), naturally desire knowledge, but are prevented, by various impediments of mind, body, and circumstances, from acquiring it. But he adds, with the fine and lofty generosity of a man consciously dwelling in another atmosphere from those around him: "As every man is naturally the friend of every man, and every friend grieves over the defects of him whom he loves, so those who are fed at the high table of knowledge are not without pity for those who eat grass with the lower animals. And since pity is the mother of bounty, those who know, give always liberally of their riches to the real poor, and are thus living fountains to satisfy the natural thirst above described. I therefore, who do not sit at that blessed table, yet, fled from the pasture of the vulgar, place myself at the feet of those who sit there, and gather up what falls from them—I, knowing the miserable life of those whom I have left behind me, and moved by the sweetness of that which, little by little, I gather up, have pitifully reserved something, a little portion of which has been already communicated to them, and which I have made them greatly desire." How his exposition resembles the bread which is served at every feast; and how this bread must be cleansed from every stain before it is offered to the guests; and how his use of the vulgar tongue instead of the Latin is like offering oaten instead of wheaten bread; yet how this oaten bread—this common mother tongue—

has some homely advantage over the more dignified language, to be afterwards expounded and set forth in a work on the vulgar tongue which he intends to write,—are the subjects of the first book or *Trattato* of the 'Convito.' A portion of the feast itself is then presented to the reader in the shape of the first poem, the same which Carlo Martello quoted in "Paradise"—

"You whose great minds move the third heaven on high,
Listen to that which breathes within my heart,
And seems so new, that nothing can be said
By me but this: That sphere which 'tis your part
To move, oh noble creatures of the sky,
To this condition has my spirit led,
Then when in speech 't should be interpreted
You chief to listen to my words, pray I."

The subject of the poem thus begun is the curious episode of nascent love recounted in the end of the 'Vita Nuova,' where, the reader will remember, a certain gentle lady, gazing at him with pitying eyes from her window, almost beguiled Dante out of recollection of Beatrice and everything else—which second love, with all the inconstancy of thought and levity of heart which it seemed to evidence, was finally combated and overcome in the poet's mind by a sudden vivid realisation of his lost lady, and all the circumstances of his love for her. He appeals to the Spirits which move the third heaven —that is, the star of Venus—the high controllers and inspiring influences of love, who have led him into the state in which he is, to hear him now; but so interwoven with allegory is the tale, that the reader, less intelligent perhaps than these Angels of Venus, may well be bewildered between the real lady of the window and the

mystical lady Philosophy, who also beguiled his sorrows and consoled his heart after the death of his first love. It is not for want of explaining, however, that this bewilderment exists; for the second book, consisting of sixteen chapters, is given up to a minute and careful examination of the poem, very similar in character—though much more extended and minute—to the explanations attached to the sonnets in the 'Vita Nuova,' and entering with still more subtle analysis into every line and every possible question that could arise. The beginning, which we have quoted, gives occasion for a full statement of the astronomical system, afterwards so largely gone into in the "Paradise," of which it is locally the foundation—which is very interesting to those students who have leisure and love sufficient to lead them to compare the earlier with the later work, and to perceive how the first idea thus shadowed forth in the 'Convito' attained its full development in the description of Heaven, written many years later. Except this scholarly interest, however, it cannot be said to be otherwise attractive, though there are many beautiful passages, of which we may take the following as a fine example. The poet has been led to the question of immortality by his own account of his lady in heaven:—

"But as the immortality of the soul is here implied, I will make a digression upon that subject; since discoursing of that, I may most fitly terminate all that has been said concerning that living and blessed Beatrice, of whom I intend to talk no more in this book. And to begin, I say that among all brutalities, that of him who believes that after this life there is no other, is the most stupid, vile, and dangerous; for if we turn to the writings of philosophers or of other wise authors, all agree in this, that some portion of

us lasts perpetually. And this Aristotle appears especially to intend in his treatise 'On the Soul;' as also all the Stoics; and Tully particularly in his book 'On Old Age;' this seems to say every poet who has spoken according to the faith of the Gentiles; this is expressed in every law—Jewish, Saracenic, and Tartaric, and by all other nations that live according to any kind of reason; so that if all were deceived, there would follow an impossibility, which even to put into words is horrible. It is certain that human nature is the most perfect of every created thing here below—and none deny this; Aristotle, indeed, asserts it in his work upon 'Animals,' where he says that man is the perfection of all the animals. While, therefore, many who live are entirely mortal, like the brute creation, and are, while they live, without any hope of another life, it follows that, if our hope were vain, greater would be our defects than those of any other animal; for many there are who have given this life for that; from which it would follow that the most perfect of living things—that is, man—would be the most imperfect, which is impossible; and that the part of him which is his greatest perfection—that is, his reason—would be the cause of his greatest imperfection: all of which is too strange to say. And further, it would follow that nature against herself had placed this hope in the human mind, since, as has been said, many rush to death in the body in order to live in the other life; and this, too, is impossible. Again, we have a continuous proof of our immortality in the divination of our dreams, which could not be if some part of us was not immortal; if we think closely, it is clear that the revealer must be immortal, whether in the body or out of the body: and that which is moved or informed by an immediate instructor ought to bear some proportion to the instructor; but between the mortal and the immortal there is no proportion. Again, we are made certain of this truth by the most true doctrine of Christ, which is the way, the truth, and the light: the way, because by it we go without impediment to the happiness of that immortality; the truth, because it permits no

error; the light, because it illuminates us in the darkness of our earthly ignorance. This doctrine, I say, makes us sure above all other reasonings; since He has given it who sees and measures our immortality, which we cannot perfectly see while our mortal is mixed with the immortal; but we see it perfectly by faith; and by reason we see it darkly in consequence of the mixture of our mortality. And this should be the most potent argument of all, that in us these two exist; and I thus believe, and affirm, and am certain that I shall pass after this life to a better—where lives that glorious lady whom my soul loved."

A book in which such passages as this occur—even though its reasoning may be antiquated in form and imperfect in argument—cannot fail to reward the studious reader; but it is not likely to lay a strong hold upon the general mind—and that the poet himself felt this, seems apparent from the fact that instead of the fourteen poems promised by Dante at the beginning, the work breaks off when only three of these poems, each with the same elaborate commentary, have been set before us. The second, the reader may remember, was sung by Casella to Dante, in the fresh morning landscape and soft sunshine, when the two met on the shore at the foot of the Purgatorial hill; a song so sweet that it beguiled even the delivered souls, and made them forget their own high errand, and that they were on the road to heaven. "Love which in my mind discourses of my lady" is still the subject; but the often-lauded perfections of that blessed Beatrice, of which the poet has already told us he will speak no more, are here presented to us with a difference, the allegorical thrusting itself in advance of the real, as never in the most dazzling mists of the 'Vita Nuova' it had done before—so that we are never sure how much is Beatrice, and how much

that "divine philosophy," which was to Dante never "harsh and crabbed," but "musical as is Apollo's lute." The third poem departs altogether from the elevated and inspiring, even if fanciful, connection with Beatrice, and brings us completely into the region of ethics. Leaving "the sweet rhymes of love," which have been his previous occupation, the poet here discusses the ignoble theory that wealth is the chief foundation of nobility, and gives it an indignant denial. We are disposed to hope that this diversion of his genius from the themes most adapted for poetical treatment opened Dante's eyes to the over-strained and fictitious character of the work altogether; but perhaps it was only the wave of evil fortune which pursued him, that here rushed in, sweeping away the poet and his book together into the renewed wanderings and struggles of life, into the 'Divine Comedy' and its greater yet more simple strain. Even at his obscurest, however, the glow and fervour of intense genius shine through, whenever the subtilities of scholastic reasoning will permit; and the 'Convito,' though but a dim lantern, still shows by intervals how vivid was the living light within it. There is a certain pathos, too, in its failure, and we look on with a silence of awe at the gropings of the great singer, not yet sure of himself or his powers, after the instrument which was to pour forth so noble a flood of song. There seems no reason to doubt that the 'Convito' was the second of his works chronologically, and was written in the very beginning of the fourteenth century.

The second of Dante's prose works—indeed the first which comes to us without any admixture of verse—is the discourse upon the vulgar tongue, 'De Vulgare Eloquio,'

already referred to. It is written in Latin, no doubt with the intention of reaching and convincing the educated public, upon whom it was most necessary to impress the excellence and use of the common tongue: as well as for the simple reason that Latin was the natural language of thought, the 'Vita Nuova' being little more than a daring youthful rebellion against rule, justified by an exceptional subject, and the 'Convito' a sequel to the 'Vita Nuova.' The arguments with which it begins have already been to some degree anticipated in the 'Convito,' which indeed contains the germ of much that is afterwards worked out in detail. We shall not attempt to enter into these arguments. The entire work of Dante is the most convincing of all arguments as to the majesty and nobleness of the language which he did so much to establish, and which has, ever since the 'Divine Comedy' appeared in it, been recognised as one of the greatest, and perhaps absolutely the most melodious and beautiful, of European languages. It is unnecessary to say that the work discusses this question with the minutest elaboration of dialectical skill, proving its many uses, its homely dignity, its ready adaptation to human need. Beginning with the fact that man alone has the privilege of this gift of speech, and that the first speech used was Hebrew, he travels by that stronghold of confusion and darkness the Tower of Babel, downwards to the formation of the three languages of Oc, Oil, and Si, and through the dialects of Italy, to the necessity for a single supreme standard of Italian, in which all lofty subjects might be worthily discussed; adding thereafter a learned disquisition on metres and measures, and all the technical framework of poetry. We give the following brief extract from the chapter

which discusses the language used in Eden, from which the reader will perceive what tender glimpses of the man Dante, and of his sorrows and affections, may be seen through the meshes of the argument even in a work so special and devoted to an individual purpose as this:—

"Since there are some so dishonest in reason as to believe their own country the most delicious which is to be found under the sun, to these persons also it appears lawful to prefer their own vulgar language, that is, their mother tongue, to all others, and consequently they believe that to have been the language of Adam. But we, who have the world for our country as fishes have the sea, although we drank the waters of Arno before we had teeth, and have so much loved Florence that for love of her we suffer unjust exile—we nevertheless lean the shoulders of our judgment rather upon reason than upon sense; and although, for our pleasure, or that which secures us most tranquillity of enjoyment, there is in the earth no place more sweet than Florence, yet, turning to the books of poets and other writers, in which the world is described both universally and particularly, and discussing among ourselves the various situations and places in the world and their customs, between the two poles and the circle of the equator, we clearly understand and believe that there are many regions and many cities more noble and delightful than Tuscany and Florence, where we were born and of which we are citizens; and that many nations and people use a more pleasant and more useful language than the Italians. Returning, then, to the question, I say that a certain form of speech was created by God, together with the first soul, . . . and according to this form spoke Adam, and all his descendants, until the building of the Tower of Babel, which is interpreted the tower of confusion; this form of speech has been inherited by the sons of Eber, who were from him called Hebrews, to whom alone it remained after the confusion of tongues, so that our Redeemer, who was destined to be born of them, might use, according to

the laws of his humanity, the language of grace and not that of confusion."

The treatise called "La Monarchia" is also written in Latin, but the period and motive of its composition are disputed—some commentators holding it to be an early work of youth, showing how Dante's mind had taken up the Ghibelline doctrine of a universal monarchy while still in Florence, as there is no allusion in it to his exile; and by others to date from the short reign of Henry of Luxembourg, when the hopes of all the exiled Italians were excited by the advent of a new emperor, bent upon fulfilling those duties of universal supervision and rectification which were to be the special work of the universal monarch. We need not enter into this question, upon which we do not feel capable of pronouncing any opinion; nor, indeed, is it possible to give, in the limited space that remains to us, any clear idea of the intricate and subtle argument—more difficult in its object, and more involved in its reasoning, than either of the previous treatises we have described—with which this question is treated. That monarchy, in this universal sense, is necessary to the wellbeing of the world; that it is the Roman nation alone which has the privilege of giving such an imperial suzerain to Christendom; and that this supreme power is from God only, without any intermediate agency between,—are the principles which, with all the force of reasoning he possesses, Dante sets himself to establish. This piece of special pleading may be supposed to have been of more importance than either of the others, from the fact that it was an active question of the time, though apparently so far-fetched and unreal: and involved battle and murder, and all the penalties of

defeat, which are worse than failure in argument. Dante had been born in the Guelf party, which held such views in abhorrence, and in it had been bred, at least until he reached the days of the 'Vita Nuova,' and began to interest himself in the larger, manly issues of politics and government; therefore his promulgation of the Ghibelline creed and distinctive doctrine was in itself a remarkable fact. And even now he was a moderate Ghibelline, going to no excess; so that we may be sure that the pretensions of the universal monarch, whom he preaches, were stated without exaggeration. The outline of the absolute ruler, whose despotism is held in check by the moral perfections with which it is necessary he should be endowed, but by no other restraint—and who is made capable of universal sway by, to state it in homely words, the impossibility of bettering himself, the fact that he has reached the very height of mortal ambition, beyond all reach of cupidity, or even the wish of acquisition,—is in itself a bewildering picture. We quote as an example of the argument one of the few passages which can be detached. He has been arguing that the sway of this great monarch, whose supremacy is such that nothing remains for him to acquire or even hope for, is the sole means of procuring general peace:—

"To all the above arguments a memorable example bears witness. This is the condition of mortal affairs which the Son of God waited for in order to assume flesh for the salvation of man. For when we survey in our minds the ages and dispositions of men, from the transgression of our first forefathers, which was the beginning of all our errors, we shall not find a time when the world was at peace and quiet, save under Cæsar Augustus, who was the monarch in a state of perfect monarchy. But that the human race was then happy

in the quiet of universal peace, all the historians and illustrious poets testify; . . . and Paul calls that most happy state the fulness of days. Certainly the age and its circumstances were so arranged that no mystery of our happiness should be wanting to the world. But in what fashion the world has been moved from that time to this, so that the seamless vesture has been torn by the nails of avarice, we have read, and God grant that we could be beyond reach of seeing. O human race! how many tempests, what ruin and wrong, art thou constrained to endure, while thou makest of thyself a beast with many heads!"

These three works, remarkable in their way, and full of matter interesting to the student, are separated in the distinctest manner, and placed by their very nature on an entirely different level from that occupied by the great poem of Dante. The 'Divine Comedy' is for all time: it is crammed full of the minutest local allusions, and crowded with names and incidents which have ceased, except as mentioned there, to interest any living creature; but nevertheless it is as living, as powerful, as comprehensible, as when it was written—a record of human existence, passion, sorrow, pity, and love, which no destruction now could tear out of the memory of men—a portion of our universal inheritance. Could Italy, with all its glories, be swept away, as the middle ages have passed away, with all their struggles and splendour, Dante would remain as great as ever, notwithstanding that he is Italian and medieval in every feature of his genius; and so long as human nature remains the thing it is, steadily triumphant in character and emotion over all the preaching of developments, no antiquity will make the great poet old. But the 'Convito' and the 'Monarchia' are archæological relics, affecting re-

mains of a chaos of knowledge and opinion, no longer, except by painful effort, comprehensible to our minds. For this reason we have not attempted to give more than the briefest account of these productions. They were for their day, and that day is past; but the journey through Hell and Heaven, and that intermediate world that lies between, through guilt and penitence and blessedness, to the presence of God, with its stern firmness of justice and unspeakable meltings of pity, and all the men and women in it, who are as living as we are, is for all time.

The collection of poems called the 'Canzoniere' contains some sonnets and songs not included in any of the works we have discussed,—some beautiful, some merely quaint and curious; but there is no feature in them that demands special notice. Some of them, according to the stories of the time, lofty and refined as they are, were sung about the streets of Florence, by the carters and blacksmiths, in the very hearing of the poet; which wonderful popular appreciation of those finest ethereal voices goes far to make us believe in the stately dream-city of the 'Vita Nuova,' where, when Beatrice lived there, and the young Dante who loved her, angels, and muses, and every lovely imagination seem to have trod the antique pavement, and, with a dazzling of celestial smiles and sunshine, irradiated all the ancient place.

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